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**A Therapist's use of the Disintegrated Self:
Getting Lost in Power, Vulnerability and Incoherence**



THE UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

Relational therapies often require the therapist's wholehearted and conscious use of self as essential to the therapeutic process. I argue that the self I bring to a client is disintegrated and often shattered and that the expectation of integration in the therapist's self is impossible to meet.

This study is aimed mainly towards practitioners as readers, in an attempt to uncover the vulnerability of therapists in light of the complex power relationships we enter into and to deconstruct the myth of the undifferentiated, fixed self of the therapist. I do this by using writing as a method of inquiry, within a post-structural research paradigm, to create a detailed exploration of inter-cultural and inter-gender therapy with a fictional client, written from my perspective as a therapist who assumes a minority identity. The writing is left deliberately disjointed and disconnected to embody this deconstructive stance.

From a post-colonial and feminist angle, I explore various themes around presence, voice, gender, race, shame, disconnect, dissociation, spirituality, consciousness, sex, integration and oneness within the context of using my self to work therapeutically with the fictional client. The jumbling and jolting experience of moving through the various realms of self is my whole world. I am left fragmented, lost and incoherent as I write into these experiences, which leaves me true not only to the method, wherein "getting lost" becomes key to creating knowledge, but also to the confusing and painful process of psychotherapy itself.

Key terms

Deconstructing therapy, Difference Diversity and Power, Disintegrated self, East-West perspective, Fictional writing, Intercultural counselling, Therapist vulnerability, Therapist's use of self

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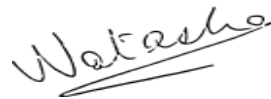
Lay Summary

Psychotherapy requires the therapist to use her self as a therapeutic tool in the relationship with the client. However, the self I bring to a client is broken and disintegrated. I argue that the expectation of invulnerability in therapists is unrealistic. I uncover my vulnerability as a therapist to challenge the myth of the whole, fixed self of the therapist. I do this by creating a detailed exploration of therapy with a fictional client. I explore the jumbling and jolting experience of bringing the various parts of “self” to the encounters with the fictional client, while using writing as a method of inquiry.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my work, carried out solely by myself. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person. It does not contain any material which has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature of candidate:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Natasha', written over a horizontal line.

Natasha Thomas

Date: __05__/_05__/_2019__

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"If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more."

–Jane Austen (1886, p. 371)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Key terms	ii
Lay Summary	iii
Declaration of Authorship	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Chapter I: Introduction	2
Chapter II: Rationale	12
Chapter III: Context for the disintegrated self	20
Chapter IV : Methodology	34
Writing as a method of inquiry and fictional writing	36
Methods in practice	39
Onto-epistemological reflections	41
Ethical considerations	46
<i>Implications for Clients</i>	46
<i>Implications for myself</i>	49
<i>Implications for family, friends and others</i>	50
Chapter V: The client and the therapist	53
A piece of him	55
A piece of me	64
Chapter VI: The Fearful Self	73
Chapter VII: The Dissociated Self : Bits and Pieces	82
Chapter VIII: The Pretending Self	90
Chapter IX: The Shameful Self	96

Chapter X: The Spiritual Self	110
Chapter XI: The Rejected Self	126
Chapter XII: Conclusion	130
Strengths and weaknesses of the study	130
Contributions to counselling and psychotherapy research	133
References	135
Appendix: Ethics Documentation	142

What Can Be Lost?

*As I danced through the streets, my ankles bound in silver
The whole town thought I had gone mad.
She'll ruin the family, my mother-in-law cried,
And the prince sent me a cup of poison.
I laughed as I drank it – don't they understand?
How can you lose your body and mind
If the Dark One has already taken them?
He is the lifter of mountains,
And Mira is safe in him.*

– Mirabai, circa 16th century

(Chopra, 2001, p. 82)

Chapter I: Introduction

I can hear my neighbour croon devotional hymns, *bhajans*, as she does every afternoon. Her off-key raspy voice – entwined in the mating calls of birds and the dull rumble of traffic – wafts in through my window. I am back home in India, at the supposed end of this journey after several years in Scotland. I am curled up with my reckless bruised heart in my childhood bed, with the dogs snoring gently under it. I still write and review my work with a practised and wearied self-criticism. I surprise myself by mouthing the words of the song with her. I am reminded that this poem by the 16th-century poet and mystic Mirabai was set to a tune. I know this because I struggled to read it in a compulsory Hindi literature class in secondary school. I resisted the dominant north Indian language with all my being. It felt foreign to me and forced upon me as a second language to prove a twisted jingoism, annihilating any appreciation for the fact that we are a diverse people. If I could manage to look through all my irritation, I would learn that the poetess was born and raised a princess but gave that up for a life of holy wandering. She joined the ranks of the many wild and insane women who refused to be disciplined. Her unique brand of craziness or mysticism, depending on perspective, was that she believed that the Hindu god, *Krishna*, was her true lover and husband.

It was sacrilegious to my young and mainstream Christian mind to hear of someone describing God as an intensely personal and erotic lover. The very idea of the sacred as sexual or vice versa had me imagining my Sunday school teacher going green at the thought. Then again, Mira was relentlessly persecuted for speaking such blasphemy, for singing and dancing in the streets, for preaching, for composing, and mostly for her persistent flailing around in public as she proclaimed how ecstatic she was in her union with Krishna, with no care for how a proper woman of the time should have been behaving. How dare a woman be that happy and that perplexing!

To make things stranger and more threatening for the authorities, she began to have a crowd following her, and there are some that still do so to this day. I remember being warned by my teacher in school to view the poem only from a literary standpoint and nothing more; we must think about how difficult it must have been for the people who knew her, her real husband for instance. Who would want a daughter or wife like Mira? I noted, although with some cynicism, that Mira's words in the ancient language sounded nothing short of orgasmic. She was in love with a "man" who for all practical purposes remained in her imagination. However, she wouldn't have cared what I thought; she felt more alive than most people, and that was what made her one of the greatest mystic poets of all time. *What would I ever need to learn this for?* I remember asking myself. Now I know. It was meant for this warm afternoon in my adulthood at the end of a long journey that brought me back home, so that I could whisper along, with Mira herself, if she is still singing.

Now, I wish that all questions tied up that neatly, but they do not. In fact, that is why I have deliberately left the writing in this thesis disjointed. The jaunting and jolting experience of both writing and (I imagine) reading this work is reflective of my own split-up, incoherent and disorganised world. The main argument I make is that the expectation of integration in psychotherapists is a false concept, as we are not integrated beings, at least not as adults. It is for this reason that this thesis embodies many different parts. They are all me, as I can still claim to be the same person in every chapter. The core dilemma of this research has been that it has been un-integrated from the start; and now I have made that circumstance the core argument. After an in-depth reading of all the various pieces I have written over the last five years to contribute to this research, I have found a detailed exploration of the vulnerability of therapists and the complexity of the power relationships we enter. I have created a nuanced uncovering of the lived experience of inter-cultural and inter-

gender therapy from the perspective of a therapist who takes on a minority identity. It has been a struggle to find the confident voice I use for the writing right now. In fact, this voice was added to the writing at the end to comment on a process that felt shaky and uncertain.

The thesis does not progress traditionally, and in using writing as a method of inquiry, the discussion begins right here in the introduction as soon as the writing does. The aim is to take the reader on a journey, one that perhaps mirrors the journey I have been on myself. It has indeed been a painful process of finding my croaking singing voice – a sound I was convinced nobody wanted to hear, least of all myself.

The course of developing my core arguments was unconventional. Through realising that any attempt to write about client experiences would always be burdened with an appropriation of their experiences, I gave up the idea of studying the experience of clients through qualitative interviews. After all, there is plenty of research on how counsellors view the client's sense of self, but much less on how we experience our own selves. In the beginning, I was intrigued by what I understood as my dissociative process and how I used my self as a therapist with clients, knowing how fragmented my inner world could be. So I began this research believing that it was about dissociation, as I understood it from a clinical perspective. I also noticed that I found meaning in moments of “relational depth” (Mearns & Cooper, 2005, p. 35) with clients, and during these experiences felt intensely present and often at one with the client. I found myself wondering how presence, and perhaps an altered state of oneness consciousness in intense, meaningful encounters, allows for something that could be thought of as the opposite of the dissociative experiences, and this potential polarity had my attention. I became increasingly fascinated by how my various states of self – sometimes distant and disconnected, at other times present, sometimes analytical but disembodied, at times intensely vulnerable, at other times feeling shameful and afraid, and in those rare moments blissfully at one with another

– played out in the therapeutic encounter. So I began to write about these experiences at first rather generally, involving concepts around dissociation, consciousness and power, and then more specifically through using a fictional client, whom I called Peter. While using Peter, I grapple with themes around power, gender, sex and race. His character serves as a literary device and a somewhat polarising position vis-à-vis myself. Peter stayed with me through the whole course of this exploration as a grounding force that keeps the inquiry connected to my practice. From a methodological stance, within the context of an academic department that valued post-structural thinking and autoethnographic research, I became drawn to writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000, p. 923). I was also introduced early on to the idea of “getting lost” (Lather, 2007, pp. 3-4) in qualitative research, which I resisted wholeheartedly.

What do you mean allow myself to get lost? Do you have any idea how long I have taken to be found?

My previous understanding of research methods, which was all about the quantitative and positivist paradigms, led me to believe that all inquiry should begin with an organised, logical, well thought out plan in order to be effective. There was no room for the spontaneous and the random in the section of my mind devoted to research. Yet, the deeply personal nature of this particular inquiry appears to have created a crack in the divisions I made between my personal and professional selves and shattered my expectations of research. For despite all my efforts to keep my writing under control, it had a life of its own.

I write this piece while travelling between and living in the United Kingdom and India, two lands I view as karmically tied across hundreds of years of deep trauma. As an Indian psychotherapist, I can find myself between two worlds – the

world of psychotherapy, grounded in formulations of the psyche that are rooted in mostly western ideas of “self” and “other”, which I know too well for something that is not really mine, and another world of philosophical and spiritual formulations in India, to which I am a foreigner for all practical purposes except that of the quiet stirrings of my heart. I found myself delving into both in the same unfortunate, unequal, and colonially appropriated manner in which I view myself. I found it extremely difficult to create, in academic writing, an authentic connection with an Eastern perspective. So the anecdotes and links to Indian thought that I used began to feel appropriated and constrained, and still appear in the thesis – as they do to me in my life – somewhat skewed and robbed of my engaged awareness. I attempted to explore the idea of oneness to explain the relational depth described in Indian thought as a result of experiencing *pure consciousness* (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 418; Mohanty, 1979, p. 10; Paranjpe & Rao, 2008, pp. 260-262), as a possible counter position to that of dissociation. I tried to understand the experience as a shift in consciousness and thus a complete shift in perspective from fear and separation to an expanded awareness of being whole. This experience of a dissolving of boundaries into an expansive blissful awareness that transcends the idea of “self” is prominent in Eastern thinking. I hoped that adding it to the inquiry would help me create a dichotomy to work with, as well as providing greater integrity in reflecting my experiences of feeling both extremes within myself. But instead of gaining more clarity, I was adding more parts of myself into the mix and making everything even more confusing. Whom was I kidding? I was completely lost and, to make things worse, it seemed I had no control of the writing as I travelled through abstract ideas, analysis, philosophical arguments, life experiences, fictional accounts, memories and here-and-now reflections. In the end, it became no longer about dissociation, oneness or shifts in consciousness, though these remain important subthemes that arose in the process. The thesis became about the process of writing my disintegrated self. This

jolting, difficult, garbling process is that of the different "parts" of myself showing up – all of which exist, as is, while I engage with Peter and we do the work of therapy.

In the last few months, I surrendered to the idea that I was, in fact, lost. So after about six title changes, many shifts in direction and countless shredded drafts, I have done what I set out not to do, and become exactly what I was always warned not to be in all my academic life – incoherent. I find myself contributing to Counselling and Psychotherapy through what Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre have called the “post-qualitative” (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 629) movement. I do this by providing a personal lived account of the therapist's use of self. As a result of the dizzy and spiralling experience of getting lost in an inquiry to the self, in all its messy parts, I allow for the writing to both “produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 27).

It is now well established that the most important aspect of relational therapies is the therapeutic relationship, way ahead of any technical knowledge or skill that the therapist may have, or any theoretical orientation (Clarkson, 1994, pp. 28-30). Marie Adams (2014, pp. 10-17) notes that psychotherapists are also portrayed as and even expected to be somewhat immune to the kind of problems they help their clients work through. There is a lot of shame and judgement around the idea of a therapist's emotional distress, often perpetuated by the therapeutic community, wherein a “better” way of handling one's problems is expected, considering that therapists are supposed to know more about mental health. That being said, any benefits to clients from knowing about a therapist's vulnerabilities are highly debatable (Farber, 2003, pp. 525-528). Nevertheless, I do believe that the dominant expectation of the therapist as a well-integrated person is, nearly all if not all of the time, unrealistic, perhaps even damaging. It has added a layer of shame to my work that has debilitated me over and over again. I have often found myself

afraid to disclose themes such as my deepest fears around client work, or my difficulties in establishing autonomy in my own life, in personal therapy for fear that my competence as a therapist will be judged.

I believe that the on-going development of self-awareness in psychotherapists is essential to ethical practice. The expectation of the always sure, resolved and fixed emotional state of the therapist can hinder the process of self-reflexivity by masking denial and dissociation as psychological growth. Indeed I believe that, as psychotherapists, we are just as capable of the infamous "flight to health" (Oremland, 1972, p. 61) as our clients are when we strive to prove our competence both within and beyond training. Within social systems that may not value relational therapies in favour of solution-focussed approaches and drug-based interventions, or within contexts that devalue emotionality, interconnectedness, "feminine" and "non-western" ways of being in the world, the pressure to be psychologically rational, coherent and invulnerable is also built up by clinical case studies and counselling training manuals that depict "successful" therapy, wherein therapists often claim the effectiveness of the various responses they gave or the techniques they used. They speak of incredible moments of insight and healing, as I often do as well when I write or speak of client work, as though the process is eventually somehow neat and complete. I challenge the usefulness of this narrative, particularly to experienced counsellors and psychotherapists who may realise, though only privately and in the company of supervisors and colleagues, that counselling is often messy, chaotic, and fraught with insecurities and uncertainty. We are also trained to be receptive and to allow a client's way of being and of relating to affect us deeply so that we can be of use to the client (Bollas, 2013, p. 20). This expectation of being steady, but also pliable enough to be available to and impacted on, even transformed by the client, can be a tall order. Being "good-enough", as Winnicott (1960, p. 590) would call it, is painful and challenging, for the "self" used as the

primary therapeutic tool is confused, cluttered, fragmented and rarely able to fulfil her own ideas of who she “should” be.

Returning to Patti Lather's (2007) feminist, post-modernist book on qualitative methodology, “Getting Lost: Feminist Efforts towards a Double(d) Science” helped me explain to myself that I was still on a research path to produce this thesis, when the confusion took over completely. Allowing the idea of a post-qualitative paradigm to sink in took time and a lot of internal negotiation. At first, I struggled with explaining how this could contribute to the field of counselling and psychotherapy, particularly if I could not prove through the writing that I had skill as a practitioner. However, as the process unfolded, I realised that I had come to a breaking point, and was compelled to let go of trying to prove to the reader that I was a “good” therapist or researcher. This stance felt blasphemous at first. After all, it was rare for me to find psychotherapists who write or speak publicly of their failures or their inner emotional mess and turmoil. Most tend to tie up their accounts neatly with comprehensive insights derived from timely and sophisticated therapeutic skill, with only a few notable exceptions (such as Adams, 2014, pp. 49-61; Wosket, 1999, pp. 108-132). Furthermore, I have spent most of my adult life championing the cause of counselling and psychotherapy, so the very idea of expressing the “flaws” in the profession or in myself as a therapist made me feel exposed and vulnerable. In deconstructing my need to appear good at my job and my practice-based research, I noticed that I liberated myself to speak of my experience, which included the pressure to be a good therapist and researcher in the first place. I had to face the reality that my intentions for my work do not always appear admirable when what is beneath them is unearthed. Lather (2007, pp. 17, 38-40) describes how in the new epistemological paradigms, where the researcher is not the expert and has undergone a crucial “loss of innocence” (i.e. she is well aware that her motives are not always virtuous and definitely not always those of a *good feminist*), new forms of knowledge

can be unearthed. She values the discomfort and uncertainty that arises from the deconstruction of more traditional ways of doing research, and she argues for the importance of imperfect and incomplete knowledge as a result of losing oneself in the process. Getting lost in itself becomes a valid research methodology.

So as I present a reckless journey, which now leaves me exposed to others, I feel frightened. Nevertheless, another bit of me, much like Mira, wonders *surely, what can be lost?*

“Therapists, I believe, are created, not so much in the womb as through their early experiences, either suffering themselves or making brave attempts to alleviate the anguish of those they love...

The struggle, in my view, rests in the impossibility of the task. There is no cure for or rescue from such suffering, only sometimes recognition and understanding. As a child I wanted my mother to be ‘well’ in order that she might enjoy me. I wonder how often with clients I have wanted to relieve them of their pain in order that I might feel better? ...

We need our clients as much as they need us, though our longing may be less explicit.”

– Marie Adams (2014, pp. 73-75)

Chapter II: Rationale

“How did you decide to do this job? It's a bit of a strange thing to do. I imagine it's hard work too. Or did you always just want to be Yoda?” Peter asks, smiling with twinkling eyes. I dread this question in all its varied forms, even though this particular Star Wars themed version of it was a first for me. The answer changes slightly every time I say it, and although it feels perfectly honest inside my head, it sounds contrived when I hear myself speak it out loud.

“Why did I become a therapist?” I repeat back to him in an attempt to buy myself some more time.

I begin to tell him how I came to this profession after much thought and how it also felt quite instinctive to me. I leave out the part about how I feel called to this work spiritually, for I have been unable to predict how speaking of spirituality will be perceived in a western context. I am not familiar with the cues and unsure of the social mores. In India, I would think nothing of saying it, but I am afraid of appearing like a fool to Peter. So I frame my answer to express how I loved having the honour of witnessing people's lives. “It is my life's work”, I say to him. “It brings me so much meaning and joy”. All true statements, and yet I also hope he doesn't hear the whispering in my chest:

And I am so terrified of living without this armour. I do not know who I would be without it. Perhaps if I were not a therapist, and we ever met, I would crumble into your arms and cry.

I once viewed myself as following life's calling to work with traumatised clients and to help empower people who felt victimised, bullied and isolated, following a well-rehearsed “rescuer” script that I am not ready to give up, lest I have to bear the indignity of not being “rescued” again. I am now beginning to see a reparative function that keeps me attached to this profession. Indeed, I saw in Peter a

reflection of my own difficulties in staying present in my body and trusting my physical experience. I manage all this from a safe distance and even feel somewhat in control – poised and sure amidst the confusion inside. In witnessing the drama of a client's life reflecting my own, I could inhabit a “third position” (Britton, 2004, p. 47) in relation to my own inner world, or even at the most extreme, disconnect from it completely. So, all this could well be an attempt to soothe the woundedness within me vicariously.

How could I possibly tell him all this? Should any client know this?

Did I even know what my real reasons were?

He moves on, appearing satisfied with my initial answer. I imagine I remain up in that exalted “spirit-guide” position he has me in, or more likely he saw me for the phoney I was and kindly decided not to expose me any further.

Freud (1937, p. 35) called psychoanalysis an impossible profession because of the number of elements that must be available to the client, and because failure on the part of the therapist is imminent, at times even required. As a therapist who engages in practice-based qualitative research, I find that this impossibility gets magnified in research. In quantitative research, when the results do not support the hypothesis, they can be stated as such, and the research remains inconclusive. However, in qualitative research, the very idea of certain findings is deconstructed to its ontological core. Thus, when the writing process takes me to a different place from where I started, a whole rethinking and shift in perspective are required as a result of what is discovered in the research, to allow it space to unfold. I notice that I have moved from an exploration of a dissociative self and my attempt to explore a counter position to it from within eastern thinking (perhaps as a convoluted way to

8pull together what I perceived as eastern and western parts of myself), to that of a disintegrated self that became evident as the writing progressed. The word “dissociation” calls to my mind a unique fragmentation wherein the other parts or states of self become inaccessible, almost as if they do not exist at all; whereas through the writing I noticed a self that felt disintegrated – shattered, but all the pieces remain as they are, or are broken down further on paper. The writing holds the pieces. For certain, there are parts of my self that have completely eluded my awareness and do not even make an appearance in this project, as well as parts that I have deliberately kept out for the sake of privacy. I bring all of it to my work with clients, to varying degrees and at different levels of awareness.

The “third position” (Britton, 2004, p. 47) that I mentioned previously is one I attempt to hold in the therapeutic relationship with Peter as well as in my relationship with myself. In doing so, I become more than an immersed participant in a relationship, but also an observer of that relationship. The position is essential for enhancing the likelihood of self-reflexivity, that is, the ability to both experience and witness the self’s relationship with the self (Bondi, 2014, pp. 50, 53). It also allows me to move between being emotionally engrossed in a client’s story and maintaining the capacity to mentally withdraw from it, yet not the relationship, so as to ponder it from an external perspective. Similarly, I have aimed to periodically inhabit the third position throughout this piece of work, as between myself and my writing, myself and Peter, and at times even myself and the reader. However, as I bring forward a part of my experience, which I often keep hidden from others for fear of being judged as inadequate, I notice that when gripped by my emotions in writing, sometimes this position becomes impossible for me to hold. I ask the reader to bear with me when I reach those moments of incoherence, for the garble is part of who I bring to the work even though it can appear hidden beneath the guise of an articulate professionalism in practice. I notice that at times, I leave it to the reader to make the

interpretation and the analysis of what they may feel is going on, for my capacity to observe gets temporarily drawn into the force of the feelings that arise. In effect, I take the risk of allowing the reader to do something I rarely allow people to do – hold and contain me.

The therapist's use of self is not a new idea in psychotherapeutic literature. For instance, Rowan and Jacobs (2002) describe how therapists may progress from using an instrumental self to an authentic self and then a transcendental self, and they give suggestions for ways in which training and supervision can meet the need to take the developing self into account. I do not draw the same distinctions between selves by experience or sophistication of skills, as Rowan and Jacobs do. Yet, I too find these three selves within me when I work with clients. In fact, my writing brings me to the transcendental self in Chapter X. The instrumental self, which Rowan and Jacobs (2002, pp. 9-27) view as predominantly used by beginner counsellors, makes an appearance as I try to get my skills right. It is the self that seeks to "do" all the things I am supposed to do in sessions backed by theory, such when I remind myself to communicate empathy (Mearns, Thorne, & McLeod, 2013, p. 55), create a holding and containing environment (Bollas, 2013, p. 33), or make close word-for-word reflections (Prouty, 1976, p. 292). The authentic self is the one I struggle with the most when I view authenticity as a state to be achieved, rather than a process. Power and vulnerability present a challenge to my ability to both feel and express my authenticity. Therefore, I offer the self I use as it is in moment-by-moment experiencing. I notice that I do not necessarily identify with some of the selves when, at the end of the writing process, I look back over what I've written. Each particular expression of self exists as it is only in the moment, and I may feel or think completely differently in the next moment. So in a way, I expand from Rowan and Jacobs's model to present my chaotic self – one that is vulnerable, broken up and fluid. This disintegrated self feels like a more realistic representation of the therapist

that I am. Through the writing, I bring out the self in each moment and allow for a subversion of the dominant discourse of the fixed, undisturbed therapist.

The therapeutic process requires some demystifying if it is to grow and develop in its usefulness to clients and communities at present. The traditional and paternalistic view of the expert practitioner who "cures" the sick patient has become notoriously hard to shake off; despite the many changes in the way counselling and psychotherapy are practised today. I believe that many difficulties in the power relationship between therapist and client arise from the age-old splits between the doctor and patient, the rescuer and the victim, the healthy and the pathological, the sane and the insane. The dominant medical model of mental health, which pathologises the perspectives of women and other oppressed groups (Shaw, 2004, p. 141), supports this dichotomised view of people. Of course, most self-aware, ethical counselling practitioners today would not openly use such extreme terms to describe themselves or their clients, and many therapists like myself do not even use the word "patient". Nevertheless, the dichotomy continues to be written into our minds even if we may not always speak of it out loud. I may unintentionally serve to propagate this grossly split-up view when I present myself as a somewhat resolved and fixed therapist, who may have problems, but problems which are "processed" and "well handled". It could be that I hope this performance will shield me from being perceived as or labelled psychologically unwell myself. So, I present as only partly human at times and I am sure my clients often see through this, as Peter did. The dynamics of the therapeutic relationship dictate that I am under no pressure to share my vulnerable self directly. Furthermore, doing so is ethically questionable. It is hard to make a universal judgement as to whether self-disclosure is beneficial to clients or hampers the process completely (Farber, 2003, pp. 525-528). This needs to be addressed on a case-by-case basis for there is much to think about when considering the potential risks and benefits of taking up the client's time and mental space with

my story. However, knowledge of the possible risks of self-disclosure can often collude with my own desire to appear secretively well put together in front of the client. At times like this, I need to remember that, as Adams (2014, p. 80) puts forward, clients need us to be many things for them, one of which is a person with the ability to face, accept and survive our own disappointments. Perhaps it is only by accepting and forgiving our own shortcomings and frustrations that we can be understanding and non-judgemental about the failures of our clients. It is only human to desire some sense of achievement as psychotherapists, but we need to be mindful of our tendencies to only work with clients who meet our requirements for satisfactory results, or to encourage clients who may feel they need to please us by re-enacting their early traumas unconsciously (Adams, 2014, pp. 74-75).

I have now amended my initial stance that I am here to “help” people, for I have realised it was a position I took to convince myself that I was indeed a good person. It came from a place of fear that I was not, in fact, a good person. Perhaps I had internalised a sense of badness to gain a sense of control (Guntrip, 1952, p. 87). As Fairbairn (1952, p. 65) would conceptualise this, I may have unconsciously attempted, early on, to preserve a sense of goodness in my objects so that the feelings of helplessness would not overwhelm me. This is possibly why I was drawn to person-centred training in counselling at first, before I trained in the dialogue between person-centred and psychodynamic approaches. My surface understanding after an initial reading of some key person-centred texts (such as Rogers, 1951, 1959, 1995) led me to become fixated on an idea of the innate goodness of people. The idea was mesmerising, but I realise that over the years I clung on to it as a defence. The theory was not about goodness in the first place, or at least not in the way I imagined it, but about the appreciation of the worthiness of every person – even myself. Now that is a tall order. For the task of loving myself, or even caring for myself, has been the most challenging endeavour I have ever taken up.

The direction I seem to be receiving from an inner wisdom is one towards healing myself and, in doing so, hopefully being able to aid and facilitate changes in clients who may wish to repair their relationships with themselves. The therapy begins, I believe, in the connection between hearts. Developing that relationship between two wounded beings, both of whom are not entirely convinced of their worthiness, is not an easy task. As a therapist, I need to both take responsibility for the person I bring into the relationship, while also being responsible to the person who meets me as a client. I need to, in effect, do as the flight attendants suggest and put on my oxygen mask before I help someone else put theirs on. Without doing this, I would be of no use. The very idea that my intentions in becoming a therapist are not as virtuous as I used to think can be deeply wounding to my ego. Sussman (Sussman, 2007, p. 192) calls this realisation narcissistically wounding, potentially resonating with the deep shame of the first and premature fall from goodness (i.e. primary narcissism, which I explore in more detail in Chapter X) experienced traumatically in infancy.

So am I doing this all for myself? To gain some reflected glory and feel important? To meet my own unmet needs?

After the initial mortification and inner outrage at the thought, I eventually rest in the relief of everything making sense. I think about how badly I wanted to save people; how my young mind came up with the conclusion that if I could save them, they would love me for it. It goes back to desperation to be seen as worthy of attention. At first, the skill of listening seemed to me to be innate, but perhaps it was also learned as a psychological survival mechanism.

I must admit that I am looking for something transformative both in and through my work. Although I believe my intentions come from a place of genuinely wanting to be of use, I may re-enact the issues of my past, as well as evading or deliberately searching for my own difficulties in the client. The shadow side of

wanting to help manifests in my desperation to take on more client work than I can bear, to prove to myself that I can transmute the suffering of my clients. This tendency could arise from a Freudian moral masochism that seems to exist amongst many therapists (Orange, 2016, pp. 51-54) – a sacrificial helping state that disguises a cruel internal superego punishing the self for Oedipal sins.

I am beginning to understand that the transformation occurs when I start to use the therapeutic skill and knowledge for myself – to listen to myself. I can still say that spirit has called me to help, though the call now seems to be more about helping myself to realise the lost connection to myself. I understand now that I can only give that which I have. Therefore, irrespective of the reasons therapists may give for choosing this career, it is an ethical imperative that we explore our intentions with as much non-defensiveness and self-acceptance as possible, and that we return to this reflection over and over again as our self-awareness expands through the course of our lives. For the self that I brought to my work when I began seeing clients is now unrecognisable to me. I change, grow and adapt constantly, and yet who I am at any given moment is what I bring to my relationships with clients. After all the training, reading, supervision, encounter groups, personal therapy, writing and listening, when I am with a client, I only have myself, and that is all I can use, as it is.

Chapter III: Context for the disintegrated self

I cannot have a conversation with my grandmother in the language of her heart. The language of her parents and grandparents is lost in the family. We speak in English, the language of the people who cut us into pieces and left us for dead. She grew up during the Indian independence movement. So I imagine she brings a broader context to her granddaughter's pomposity around English. Sometimes she speaks to me in Malayalam and calls out a three-year-old deep inside me. I long to reply but I have imprisoned the childish words in my throat. I am embarrassed by my lack of knowledge of grammar and sentence structure, haunted by an "English" accent that mocks the fabric of an ancient language. I can speak a few words but I don't because I refuse to feel like a fool – a silly child – so I pass the burden back and I reply in English.

"Your English is pretty good", I hear the British man lean over the table and say to me. We are on a first date.

"So is yours", I smile back – a well-practised flirtatious yet passive-aggressive retort, which is much better than what I actually want to say, which goes more like, "You condescending bastard – it is my first language! Maybe take a look at your history and notice that your ancestors forced this language on us and now it is the only way I can express myself and you want to take that away from me as well by making me a foreigner to my own tongue. Yes, my English is pretty good; it's miles ahead of the other three languages I speak – which in fact, thanks to you, I cannot speak!"

Should I even be here talking to this guy?

He continues to dissect my language skills despite my attempts to stop him in

his tracks. My mind flashes to images of Saartjie Baartman, the African woman put on display as a “freak show” attraction in 19th-century Europe. I thank my stars that it is just my voice he is scrutinising and not my body (well, at least not out loud). Some of my irritation leaks out eventually and he goes on to proclaim, “How should I know what your first language is? I was trying to give you a compliment!”

“Yeah it is a big, diverse country and it is complicated”, I say.

Well you could know – the same way I know so much about you.

Anyway, he tries to be more sensitive and says, “Well I suppose we made quite a mess there and left. Come to think of it, you have a British last name as well. I’m sure we forced that on you guys as well.”

“It is a Hebrew name, not a British one. We had the family name and Christianity long before the Europeans arrived, in fact even before the religion appeared in Europe.”

He looks offended and annoyed, perhaps a little ashamed, I imagine. There is a red-hot burning in my belly. I quickly begin to convince myself that I have been too aggressive and spend the rest of the evening trying to make him feel better about the “little” error he made. I’m afraid he will lose his temper; I am terrified I will lose mine.

“It’s no big deal”, I try to bolster his ego. “I get this all the time. I suppose I have become a bit touchy about it. I cannot expect you to know. It just hit a nerve and I am oversensitive about these things”, I ramble on, apologising for his mistake. This is the old familiar fawning and pleasing. I can do it with my eyes closed and half my brain dead. In fact, I probably did.

I walk home in the brutally cold rain thinking about how shockingly easy it is

to sell your soul for a free dinner and some attention from a good-looking man.

“To control speech is to control the speaker. Speaking under one’s breath, one negotiates the space between silence and freedom. To speak under one’s breath is to speak and to keep on living. Such claims seem true for those who live their lives in subordination. I should say, perhaps under my breath that I cannot recall ever speaking under my breath. That is the privilege, I guess of those of us who do not have to worry about what words we breathe in and what words we breathe out.” (Pelias, 2004, p. 32)

I was surprised by how much envy arose when I read the above sentences. Imagine never having to talk under one’s breath! The vast majority of what I say is under my breath, in my head, in my journals, to myself. I also began to feel irritated with the idea that this could signify subordination on my part, when speaking under my breath is the way I honour myself with my audience. It is the manner in which I challenge the idea that an external world matters as much as I am told it does, with the most compelling knowledge that my vast inner world is always aware of me and always listening. It is from the place of creating multiple selves and shifts in awareness of them that I challenge hierarchies and even transcend them

The perception of one’s self as singular and bounded could perhaps be a “privilege” for individuals who have never had to speak under their breath, if any such individuals exist. Furthermore, I find that my female body cannot hide from the evidence that we all live inside each other and come out of each other. This assumption of singular selves shows up in many psychotherapeutic formulations. Rogers’s (1959) conceptualisation of self-development, for instance, which was initially based on North-American Humanist philosophies, postulated that as aspects

of a child's development are valued and accepted with unconditional positive regard, they become incorporated into the child's growing self-concept. Aspects that are ignored or rejected become denied to one's awareness of self although they are still experienced at an organismic level. In further developments of person-centred theory, the idea of configurations of self has grown – particularly within Warner's conceptualisations of fragile and dissociative processing (Warner, 2000), and the process-experiential approaches that focus on the interaction between parts of self (Elliott & Greenberg, 1997). As therapeutically useful as I have found these configurations for their acceptance of parts of self, I realise that I can still often prioritise the idea of an integrated coherent self as the desired outcome of therapy, and consequently thus assume that I have to present myself as integrated to achieve this end. I had bought into the idea of a “healthy” self, reflecting what Bhabha (2004, p. 131) calls “the phobic myth of the undifferentiated whole white body” as a physical and intellectual ideal historically set up in colonial discourse, which continues to influence our perceptions of how the self should be. I explore this further when I consider the post-colonial impact on self later in this chapter.

I learned of my preconceived notions the hard way when one of my earliest clients*¹ ended therapy, insisting that she no longer wanted to feel like an assimilated single self, but would rather live with the split-off parts of the self. With my psychology background, I found myself diagnosing her experiences of separate selves, each with individuated consciousness, as a severely fragmented case of dissociated identity. Furthermore, my person-centred counselling training privileged the idea of a whole person as the focus of our work. We worked on creating dialogue and awareness between the selves of each other. However, as the selves began to

*Any “client” mentioned is fictional, though loosely inspired by a range of different experiences in clinical practice that allude to a similar theme.

merge, she called me out on my agenda. She valued each one of her “personalities” as they were, and this self that accepted all the other selves served as a sort of meeting ground for all the parts. She had achieved the ability to hold the aspects of her self in a sort of hovering awareness, with genuine curiosity about the experience of each part. It was often painful for her to remain broken, but in a position of dignity where her trauma no longer defined her, and she did not appreciate my attempts to pull her together, however well-meaning I believed these efforts to be at the time. Looking back now, I think I was hoping it was possible to succeed in this effort, so that I could believe I was finally “pulled together”, and continue undisturbed in my own delusion that this profession had “saved” me from my own difficulties. Indeed, psychotherapists often choose the occupation as an attempt to heal themselves; or they unconsciously recreate an early experience of failure in relieving the pain of those they love (Adams, 2014, p. 73). It is a profession in which I find myself in a perpetual state of looking back with regret and even guilt regarding things I did not understand earlier, not just for my clients but also for myself. I soothe myself by hoping that I may do better in the future for what I know now, though the failures continue to haunt me.

Spivak (1988) applies Foucault's term “epistemic violence” (the infliction of harm against subjects through discourse) to describe the destruction of non-western ways of viewing the world, and the consequent dominance of the western ways of perceiving the world, which often portrays people from countries that were once colonised as passive recipients and shallow imitators of western culture. This marginalisation has been and continues to be a process whereby the history of groups of previously colonised people is almost completely left out of the writing of history altogether. The idea of the self of a subaltern person is constructed and viewed through the lens of the dominant group, even when we view ourselves. Furthermore,

discourses around self and consciousness that were developed in previously colonised populations, particularly in the east, are often completely left out of psychotherapeutic discourses. When included, they are done so in ways that make them appear “mystic”, “exotic” and somehow less worthy of credit for being “religious”, even though many western philosophical constructions of self have religious underpinnings as well. For example, the Cartesian duality, which is the foundation of the mind–body problem that governs most of western thinking and academia, is based on the assumed dichotomy of creator and creation in western Christianity (Inwagen, 1995, pp. 475-476). In addition, there is a wealth of information within Indian and other eastern philosophical discourses which is typically kept out of therapeutic thinking, unless anecdotally appropriated, due to the polarising and fragmenting effects of colonisation. This keeps psychotherapy operating within western conceptualisations of “self”. Creating fixed and static separations between the “self” and “other”, and consequently between “parts” of self, has become a familiar and perhaps essential way to maintain some sort of dignity within social contexts that seem to both reward this schizoid splitting (Klein, 1996, pp. 164-165) and pathologise it at the same time.

Bhabha (1983, p. 18) asserts that it is the “fixity” of the stereotype of the east that colonial discourse is based on. The word “East” itself, used to represent a group of non-western cultures most of which were previously colonised, is a creation of the “West”. The binary relationship between East and West was created by the colonists to allow for the oppression of the vast and diverse societies of what is now called the Middle East, the Indian Subcontinent, and Asia, inhibiting them from expressing themselves as distinct unique and complex cultures, while automatically instituting the East as a kind of alter ego of the West (Said, 2003, pp. 204-206). So as I use the words ‘eastern’ and ‘western’, I am aware that the distinction is highly simplistic and

somewhat arbitrary. Yet I use the notions because they have influence in the dominant discourse and power within my inner world. While using the generalised notions of East and West, it is important to note that there is a core difference in ontology between the two philosophical traditions, with the western focus being on studying objects within consciousness and the focus of eastern and particularly Indian thought being on studying consciousness itself (Cornelissen, 2008, pp. 414-420). This has major implications for how the self is viewed and understood.

The dominant narratives in western psychotherapy have a tendency to problematise shifts in consciousness and therefore a non-unified self, albeit to varying degrees. As a result of the paradox in society's inherent reliance on "normal" dissociation, groups as well as individuals disconnect to protect themselves from anxiety, as is often required and encouraged in society. For example, professionalism (especially in the health professions) mandates a mastery over dissociation in that we have to hide our "pathological" aspects (Sinason & Silver, 2008, p. 249). I have recently become aware that almost everything I read in academic literature seems to contain an assumption that the reader is western. I am beginning to realise the extent to which I have had to take on a disembodied western view in order to take in the ideas of writers. Even literature about non-western ideas seems to be directed at a western audience and to appropriate philosophies in such a way as to allow them to be understood through a western lens. This "western" self that I have unknowingly created and through which I operate in my academic and professional life cannot be embodied, as my body gives away my true identity. In effect, this contributes to what Winnicott (1965, p. 133) would call an intellectualised false self. An extreme False Self can stifle the spontaneous gestures of the True Self in favour of a lifeless imitation.

Orbach (2009, p. 69) extends Winnicott's theory of how environmental failure can lead to an inner rupture of mind and body, and proposes the False Body –

a fake impression of one's own body. She understands the false self as an overdevelopment of specific parts of the self at the cost of other parts, thus creating an enduring distrust of anything that arises impulsively or instinctively from the True Self. Winnicott (1965, pp. 145-148) perceived the True Self as ingrained in the experience of being alive, which he called simply being. From this, the baby generates the feel of reality and an awareness that life is worth living. Orbach (2009, pp. 115-118) notes that the female false body in particular is assembled upon identifications with others, at the expense of an inner sense of genuineness and consistency. She argues that deconstructing this colossal but false body-sense could permit the materialisation of a gamut of real, though often painful, bodily sensations and emotions which have been previously denied and dissociated out of awareness. As desirable as this deconstruction seems to me personally and in relation to my "agenda" as a therapist with clients, I now think that the attempt to get rid of the false self or integrate parts of self is simplistic. It parallels how the colonists left, somewhat squashing together separated cultures, languages and peoples into an appropriated country after they broke it apart in the first place, and then leaving them to fight amongst themselves. I think that as a therapist, I can sometimes forget that I can represent the powers of the societies we live in that control, manage and socialise, as much as I wish to play the fantasy role of some sort of an anarchist healer. In pushing for psychic unity within both my clients and myself I may trample all over a hard-won capacity to survive. After all, Winnicott (1965, p. 142) himself considered the false self essential in preventing something worse: the annihilation of the concealed True Self.

I find Bhabha's (1997, pp. 152-154) description of mimicry to be particularly elucidating for this experience of what I understand as a sort of disintegrated empowerment. One of the most important features of the British Empire was the

British civilising mission (Fischer-Tiné & Mann, 2004, pp. 1-5), which presented the coloniser (the white British gentleman), as an epitome. A potent illustration of this is the attempted systemic annihilation and vilification of feminine divinity in many Indian cultures. The Hindu devotion to the divine feminine appalled the Victorian sensibilities of colonial administrators and missionaries who not only derided men, specifically, who worshipped a goddess as weak, effeminate and vulnerable, but also viewed this, generally, as a sign of degeneration and lack of rationality; as opposed to the strength and toughness of British masculinity (Sugirtharajah, 2002, p. 103). Nandy (1982, pp. 197-219) calls out the hypermasculinist discourse of British Orientalism and suggests that it drew on the rigid dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine that was central to the gender ideologies of Post-Enlightenment Western Europe. This in turn reshaped and pathologised the more fluid and diffuse gender identities in the Indian tradition. It was further expanded with the gendered implications of colonial discourse through an eroticisation of the “Orient” as female and the feminisation of the colonised male in opposition to the colonising male. This is usually accompanied by the metaphor in colonial discourse of heterosexual rape – with the image of the colonised country as a woman raped by her coloniser (Sinha, 1999, p. 447). This image of the rape of my country is one I have hauntingly heard over and over again. The re-appropriation of the feminine force of Shakti grew to become a source of empowerment in the later stages of the Independence movement, wherein the British rule of India itself came to be seen as a violation of the feminine principle (Sugirtharajah, 2002, p.103) and, through Gandhi’s challenge to British colonialism, as located specifically in the essential supremacy – which he refused to consent to – of a “masculinity” that was likened to rationality, materialism, and physical force (Sinha, 1999, p. 448). Indeed, the very fact of British domination in India served as “proof” of a “masculine superiority” which began to be emulated by elite males in 19th-century India as an idealised masculinity (Sinha, 1999, p. 448).

Sadly, the far-reaching consequences of this “colonial rape” are mirrored everyday in the dangerous misogynistic gender relations that I see in the India I live in today, marked by a twisted, intolerant and fanatical conception of “Indian-ness” which requires the subordination of women for its existence.

Paradoxically, the colonised people, in adhering to this ideal image forced on them, were also mocked for being too well-colonised internally and being “more British than the British” (Thomas, 2013, p. 121). According to Bhabha (2004, p. 221), mimicry is a substitute for presence. Mimicry emerges when people of a colonised group impersonate and replicate the way of being of the colonisers. He draws on Lacan's understanding of imitation as an indispensable camouflage that is essential for survival, as it would be in warfare, rather than just an attempt to harmonise with a backdrop (Lacan, 1977, p. 91-104). Colonial Mimicry originates from the colonist's wish for an improved and identifiable other. Sadly, the colonist's aspiration to appear as “authentic” also manifests through a process of constant repetition of this partial description of the colonised as simple mimics. However, Bhabha (2004, pp. 245- 282) does not unravel mimicry as only a narcissistic identification with the coloniser wherein the colonised would no longer be a person without the coloniser's existence in her identity. The colonists' aspiration to appear as the original overturns as the colonial appropriation produces, though inadvertently, a gaze from the *Other* as the counterpart to the coloniser's gaze which emancipates the marginalised individual. The core defining symbols of the “ideal” culture or identity become replicable, unoriginal and subsequently increasingly empty. This empowerment happens through the breaking up of the unity of the subjugated individual's being which has become the price she pays and the choice she makes to gain autonomy while subsequently shattering the oppressor's representational authority.

Mimicking the dominant group and thus creating many selves within myself can inadvertently rattle the foundations of that which is considered the defining factors of the dominant group, be it making sure that I act masculine in a male-dominated job, or making sure that I enunciate my English appropriately when I am in Britain. In fact, I often see my body as colonised not only by Europeans in history and current repercussions of that history, but also by men of various ethnic groups, who often claim rights to own and control my body. Much as slaves were made to take the names of their masters; women are identified by the closest male relative who “owns” them. So, I create an alternative, dissociated self every time I present a body that looks as though it did not bleed every month, hold my tongue in discussions when men speak, or practise my profession as though a western and masculine conceptualisation of self were thoroughly accurate. I can inhabit both worlds and also pull them both down as I see the distinctions for the delusions they are. All of this happens at a huge cost to myself, for sure, and I could be potentially established as pathologically dissociated by the powers that be in the world of mental health. At other times I can feel physically ill, exhausted and robbed of what I can experience as my right to be and feel feminine in an attempt to prove my capabilities. As a result of the authority of the dominant binary conceptualisations that interpret femininity as essentially irrational, female researchers always run the risk of being belittled in respect of their ability to present a convincing argument when they draw attention through a feminist lens to traditionally feminised issues (Bondi, 2004, pp. 5-7) like emotions, the body, subjectivity or even spirituality, or attempt to express the experience of the “feminised” colonised.

From this perspective of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 166-167; Nash, 2008, p. 2) – the stance that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the sum of the component identities – the alienation from one's identity, breaking up of the self, creating an imitative self that is disconnected from

the body or from other “parts” of self can be understood as responses to the colonisation of the body. The pervasive disregard of non-dominant bodies urges the necessity to have a right within dominant discourse without gaining an identity from the colonising group. Fragmentation of self may become the only way to do this. Furthermore, I am aware that the only way for me to take part in the discussion is to adopt certain colonially appropriated “selves”. For instance, at this moment I present these ideas to a British institution and contextualise them within a western academic context. I have also struggled to present a somewhat masculinised, linear, neat and closed argument when my own trajectory of thought is cyclical, creative, intuitive, open and wild – everything I associate with being feminine. Even my writing cannot be created without some ability to keep it separate from my physical body so as not to be considered a completely irrelevant “other”. Yet in doing so I can join the discussion and potentially stir it up, maybe even change it, but I must keep it dissociated from who I am, so that who I am does not completely get trampled on. This way, the broken-up bits of me have more power than a cohesive me.

The process of disintegration of self, within the traditional psychological sense, is often understood as trauma induced, though we could also consider it a process of deconstructing the abuse of the body, not simply escaping it as is often suggested. Escape and avoidance is perhaps only present insofar as it is appropriated and expected to be by the dominant social, cultural and political context so that the person remains relevant to it, while the dissociated self, even though possibly “false”, allows the person the capacity to be her own subject. I would have assumed that this would make the disintegration more than a defence mechanism, but rather a sophisticated process both put in place by wider colonising and regulating agents and also inverted back by the experiencer, at the cost of fragmenting oneself, to regain the power and agency that was once lost in cohesion. It is obvious then that a unified, embodied experience in non-dominant groups would create fears in society, as their

bodies may threaten to escape modern forms of power and regulation.

“The nakedness of woman is the work of God”

– William Blake

(Blake & Plowman, 1927, p. 34)

Chapter IV: Methodology

"Social life is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If our desire is to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion."

(Adams et al., 2015, p. 9)

As a child, I wrote to myself frequently for I was often on my own in school. My writing was a dialogue with my inner self, sometimes with a higher self to ask for guidance or with real or imagined people in my life. I wrote about my observations of myself, my family and the other children, and mostly tried to figure out these fragmentations and separations. I still have moments in my day when I must write to figure out where my spirit is. At times I wonder if I am trying to leave a trace of myself that I can see, and then convince myself of my worthiness to accept the gift of my existence.

It felt natural to drift towards writing as a form of inquiry when I began this project, while contextualising it within the broader field of autoethnographic research. It has been an intuitive process but not a pleasant one. Giving myself permission to use my meandering writing as a valid form of research for others to read, thereby convincing myself that I had something to say that was worth writing about, was a monumental and excruciating task. It wedged open the rusted cracks in the timeworn armour, ready to protect me from the all too common objectification and mockery of my nakedness. If I am one clear single self to the world, I am afraid I will be torn to shreds.

I realised that there were various aspects of my identity that I used to club my

creativity repeatedly over the head until she lay unconscious on the floor. I was horrified to recognise that I was saying to myself that my writing around my experiences was of no value because I am a woman, too young, too brown, too lazy, too inexperienced and of course, the greatest and most irrelevant silencer of them all – too fat. *Who am I to say that my writing, the ramblings of a silly girl, could have any value to the academic community? I should just pack up and go home.* In fact, I did go home to India in the last year, feeling defeated and exhausted, where, with more support and the comfort of home, I somehow managed to salvage the project. Every time I gained momentum in the writing process, the critical inner voices would wake up and shred the drafts. The process was exhausting at best and plain heart-breaking at worst.

So now, as I present my methodology, I am faced with a sudden and seemingly obvious appreciation that it was in the excruciating process of attending to every crippling piece of self-doubt and anxiety that I birthed the defence of my methodology. In fact, it is for every reason that I once deemed my voice and myself inadequate that this inquiry gains any validity at all. As a young woman of colour from a previously colonised country in psychotherapy research and practice, I can feel like a bit of an oddity at times. I can perceive my voice as inappropriate to qualitative research, not as unwelcome as some other voices for sure, but viewed, as I imagine it, with either suspicion or condescending amusement. I struggle to find my words striving to be relevant to the dominant gaze in this field. Somewhere along the way I realised that, despite my outer convictions of inappropriateness, a profound inner knowing refused to let a system that reflects a contorted opinion of our existence tell me that I do not matter.

Writing as a method of inquiry and fictional writing

One often thinks of writing as a way of describing or “telling” about reality, an experience or the world, especially within academic settings. However, it is possible for writing to be a modality of “knowing”, of uncovering, exploration and analysis (Richardson & St Pierre, 2005, p. 961). It is not just a symbolisation of my experience or even a discovery of it, but also the creation of experience. Speedy (2005) notes commonalities between writing as inquiry as a research methodology and the conversational discourses of psychotherapists and clients, with tentative dips and dives into the unknown being central to both, thus suggesting that both endeavours have a lot to learn from each other. The method aims to draw the reader's attention and engagement into conversations; curiosity, imagination and more questions (Speedy, 2005). Yet, inquiry in counselling and psychotherapy generally continues to be dominated by the discourses of “scientific report writing” which have distinguished themselves from other forms of writing (Speedy, 2005). The so-called literary texts are presumed to be somehow softer and enjoyable, but, though meaningful in our personal lives, not significant for the “facts”. Meanwhile, the report style of academic writing makes a naïve assumption that the “written”, the “studied” and the “lived” are somehow perfect interpretations of each other (Speedy, 2005).

I use a *storying* methodology (Clough, 2002, pp. 9-10) to create a fictional client, “Peter”, and I write into the experiences of working therapeutically with this “client”, in the hope that it may elucidate the main themes of this research. In some ways, the writing may appear somewhat to resemble a case study, drawing on a long tradition of case studies in psychotherapy. My main reason for creating a fictional client is to avoid implicating real clients in research that is mainly about myself.

Being a work of fiction, it creates a verisimilitude of some aspects of my clinical practice, rather than a description of it. A story emerges in an inter-subjective space where nothing is impossible, and the narrative takes on a co-constructive, collaborative mind of its own (Talbert, 2016). Fictional writing is deconstructive, as much as it is creative. In using a “clinical setting” as the backdrop for inspired writing, I realise that I write something that somewhat mimics a case study rather than being one itself. Mimicry can destabilise dominant ways of seeing the world in a manner that can remain initially indiscernible to those who hold the dominant positions in the first place (Bhabha, 1997, pp. 158-160). In creating a fictional case study, wherein the client is white and male, and the therapist is brown and female, there is an apparent flip in some traditional research and therapeutic roles, subverting the “white saviour” narrative. Moreover, the fictional client embodies much of the split-off aspects of the counsellor’s psyche. This intention runs counter to the narratives of a traditional case study wherein the client is often studied as a subject to be considered outside of the therapist/researcher, though in relationship and dialogue with her, rather than an internal and transformed object in the therapist’s mind.

However, Flyvbjerg (2001, pp. 55-65) argues that social sciences need to develop epistemology based on Aristotelian “*phronesis*” or practical wisdom. He asserts the redundancy of attempting to imitate natural sciences in developing epistemologies for social sciences. There appears to be only context dependent knowledge in the field of social science, which has so far been unable to produce predictive theory and universal knowledge. He further asserts the need for specific, context dependent and intimate knowledge that allows people to develop their skills and expertise, through the development of a nuanced view of reality as a result of the researcher’s sustained closeness to the studied experience (Flyvberg, 2011).

A significant issue confronting qualitative researchers in psychotherapy is that notions of “self”, “the unconscious” or “authenticity”, which are often at the

core of therapeutic formulations, sit less comfortably within main forms of qualitative research such as qualitative interviews, which view its human subjects as social beings and assumes that they can describe their experience as it is to them, without considering that there may be aspects of the experience unavailable to awareness (McLeod, 1996). Therefore, it is becoming essential that an appreciation of methodological pluralism develop within qualitative research for it to be relevant in psychotherapy research, and particularly to allow that which is unconscious to arise in the research process. In response to this concern, fictional writing can be a methodology that allows material not in awareness to be projected outwards onto fictional characters and situations.

I find myself writing into my experience with the integrity of my body, heart and mind. I looked for a methodology I could adopt which allowed me to shift positions, not always telling a story chronologically, but sometimes doing so, trying to stay in the present moment but with permission not to do that as well. Equally, I do not believe it is possible to do any research beyond myself. So, for now, I write as me. I view the fictional client, and the fictional therapeutic relationship as Yue and Durepos (2009, p. 395) do when they describe fictional text as a cultural artefact that we can analyse as an effect or a mirror of certain relational phenomena situated within a specific time and place. Thus, fictional situations in my writing embody the norms and patterns that are relevant to the culture of psychotherapy – the context which I inhabit. The process of writing and rewriting is intended to create depth in the creative process of bringing out the complexity and ambiguity that normally remain hidden within this context.

Methods in practice

“The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but by the play instinct acting from inner necessity. The creative mind plays with the objects it loves.”

– Carl Jung (2013, p. 155)

I began this process by allowing myself to scribble thoughts and ideas on paper. Looking back, I realise that I had begun writing some of the ideas I present here before the research component of the course began. So in effect, the writing here has grown and developed over five years. I wrote in books, on pieces of paper, on my laptop and in various locations mostly in Edinburgh and Mumbai, though some of the writing was done in flight and in transit. I did a lot of it sitting up in bed, in the library, in coffee shops, outdoors sitting on the grass, or at the dining table. The volume of writing I produced far exceeds what is included here. I excluded many pieces for ethical reasons, such as potential identification of other important people in my life, or because some of the writing left me feeling overexposed to the scrutiny of an academic audience. I was inspired by my experiences of “dissociation” and I used that as a starting point, but then let the writing lead me to what felt important and what hurt. Eventually, the dissociation angle uncovered itself as an inherently defensive position, for even though I may go into long theoretical discourse periodically, it shelters me from some of the revealing expressions I make.

I found the experience of writing itself to feel rather involuntary – that is, I did not feel as if I had conscious control over much of what I had written. I found myself thinking back to what it was like to be in the counselling room. Peter was created very early on; he just seemed to appear in the writing as a counter position

that developed him into a client. I find it hard to describe how or why I created what I did because a lot of it felt as if it came through me rather than from me. I would often read over what I had written, aghast that I could not remember writing much of it or even imagine that I could feel that way.

I have left the writing purposefully raw and un-analysed, to express an evocative, *heartful* (Ellis, 1999, p. 669) autoethnography rather than an analytical one. I typically write in lengthy prose involving dialogue and occasional theoretical discussion. As a creative methodology it is meant to be evocative and invites the reader to think and feel. At times I go into long theoretical discussions and now notice that my intellectualised self takes over with theory at difficult points in the process. Some pieces seem disjointed and disconnected, and may even seem confusing for the reader. The confusion is put forward deliberately to be true to the chaotic experience that a self in the counselling role can be. At various points I become incoherent. Even though at first I struggled to create cohesion and make sense of the writing, I later allowed this experience to unfold and take up space in academic text. In doing so I challenge the assumption of the unity of the self of the therapist and even of the researcher.

Onto-epistemological reflections

The story of the blind men and the elephant originated in the Indian subcontinent, most probably from the Jaina tradition, and has been greatly diffused among various eastern philosophies and traditions (Saxe, 2016, pp. 22-25). A group of blind men standing in front of an elephant were asked to describe what was before them. Each man touched a different part of the elephant. The one who touched the tail said it was a rope; the one who touched the elephant's leg said it was a pillar; the one who felt the trunk said it was a tree branch; the one who felt the ear said it was a hand fan; the one who felt the belly said it was a wall; and the one who felt the tusk said it was a solid pipe. In the Jaina tradition, it is explained that all of them are right. The reason each person is telling it differently is that each touched a different part of the elephant. So in fact the elephant has all the characteristics that each of the men mentioned. There is no assumption that the men do not see "the ultimate truth" because they cannot; rather, each knows a valuable truth that only he can know given his position relative to the elephant.

Indeed, the Indian philosophical tradition has developed a way to resolve differences in viewpoints, with a presumption that the underlying structure of *reality* as well as of *truth* is essentially tiered, that the upper spans of the hierarchy are ineffable and unattainable, and that human philosophies and concepts can never be more than partial representations (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 414). This allows many understandings and representations of knowledge to exist at what are regarded as different levels of experience and reality, but no one can claim to have the one and only truth, as every exploration is equally valid although they exist in parallel to each other. This way of thinking allows for many states of everything and for the idea that shifting from one state to the next brings about a new *reality*. Positivism as epitome

of reason was introduced to India by the colonialists; dominating over the sophisticated onto-epistemology of the subcontinent which was based on various competing philosophies on the nature of the relationship between knowledge and consciousness, giving rise over several thousand millennia to the idea of all things being interconnected and interdependent within consciousness; thus all arguments valid (Mohanty, 1979, p. 3).

Instead of considering ontology (what is knowledge?) and epistemology (how do we know what we know?) separately as is traditionally the case, I discuss them together from the view of ontoepistemology (Barad, 2007, p.379), holding the perspective that they are intrinsically linked. The profoundly interconnected way that everything is enmeshed with everything else means that any observation makes a cut between what is included in and excluded from the subject being considered (Barad, 2007, p. 380). For Barad (2007, pp. 378-380), things or objects do not precede their interaction. As nothing is integrally distinct from anything else, and splits are only temporarily endorsed so that one can inspect something to obtain knowledge about it, this knowing in being encompasses the position I take when writing.

When I use writing as a form of inquiry I notice that the data for the inquiry is the writing itself. For the source of this writing could be thought of as existing only within myself before it is written (if it exists at all before being written), so it is not possible to divorce what knowledge is from how I arrive at that knowledge, because the writing is both the process to knowing and the knowing itself.

At a stretch, it is possible to source the data as existing somewhat within myself as I seek to explore and analyse my own inner world through the writing. Viewing it in this way would mean that I could potentially emphasise previous experience as a source of knowledge and a way of knowing. However, I cannot in good conscience say that the material existed before I began writing about it. This has not been a “mopping-up” process (Richardson, 2000, p. 923). The client

character I create in this process is a literary device to further explore the topic, and he appears to create and grow upon himself as I write.

So am I creating something as I write that didn't exist before the writing? Did the "knowledge" exist within myself or did I create it as I write? I cannot answer these questions as I do not believe the existence or non-existence of the phenomena I write about can be understood in this way. The closest image I can use to describe this process is the act of remembering something which was previously not in my awareness. Hindu philosophy calls this kind of knowing *smriti* (that which has been called to mind), a form of knowledge that is fluid, changing over time as it is remembered, written down and constantly revised, and is considered less authoritative and dogmatic than *shruthi* (that which is heard) and therefore established as canon (Gibson, 2002 pp. 8-9). Therefore, asking myself where the writing comes from would mean giving cognitive and emotional experiences temporal and spatial qualities and thus appropriating the inner world into that which is "scientifically" understood as the outer world. I understand that we try to make these claims to propose that qualitative research possesses the attribute of rigour, as it clearly does not possess reliability, validity or generalisability in the same way that quantitative research does in order to meet its goals (Tobin & Begley, 2004). It becomes problematic to try to place what knowledge is, where the knowledge exists or how it is retrieved, without being aware that these distinctions are hard if not impossible to make. If I had to truthfully answer the question of where my writing comes from, I would sometimes say it came from myself and at other times state that it came through me from somewhere else – a higher self perhaps. The writing comes from ineffable realms, some of which are available to my consciousness in terms of ideas and memories and others not; I sometimes attribute it to the unconscious, the collective unconscious, my imagination or something or someone else that I cannot quite name.

Perhaps the problem in articulating this comes from the problem of defining self. Paranjpe and Rao (2008) assert that part of the problem with the concept of self arises from the contradictory ways in which the word “self” is used in the English language, as is the word “identity”. Sometimes self implies the many social roles that define our position in life, which are suggestive of many selves that differ from one situation to another and are open to change over time. At other times it is indicated through one’s identification with specific beliefs, emotions and actions. Alternatively, self implies something in us that unites various roles and remains the same over time – some essential quality. Paranjpe and Rao (2008) put forth the observation that most of us for most of the time have a clear experience of being and remaining the same person regardless of the many changes in every aspect of what we believe ourselves to be. To say that I am the same person I was, and yet admit at the same time that I have changed, is a paradox, as sameness is the precise opposite of change and unity is the opposite of multiplicity. Thus the idea of unity and self-sameness in persons has important psychological, moral and existential implications – indeed our social structures (especially our justice systems) are based on a constant personal identity across time and space as defining moral and social responsibility for our actions. In the history of Indian thought, Buddhist and Vedantists debated this issue of identity and moral responsibility, particularly in view of the Buddhist view of incessant change that threatens the notion of personal identity (Paranjpe & Rao, 2008). They further present the ontological issue of knowing what, if anything, stays the same in people as one of most difficult problems in philosophy, with a further epistemological issue of how to find a satisfactory way of knowing this. Paranjpe and Rao (2008) further challenge a positivist method of knowing by pointing out that the word “empirical” ironically means that which is grounded in experience, and in that sense, there is no difference between the empirical and the experiential. This perspective lies in parallel to modern western thought, with some notable exceptions

in qualitative research, that focuses on “looking out” at the world of objects to bring forth facts, rather than “looking into” the world of subjective experiences as evidence.

So to answer the core onto-epistemological questions, I understand knowledge as experienced phenomenon, which does not necessarily exist beyond the way of finding this knowledge. I realise that this creates circular arguments, such as the idea that perhaps the writing is then done simply for the sake of writing itself. This may be the case. Yet I am awestruck by how, despite this, human beings have not stopped writing since we first started. It seems to add value to our lives. It is the apparent “pointlessness” of the process that compels writers to avoid taking ourselves so seriously, as we could after all think of ourselves as only doing this for the sake of doing it. This seems much like life, which when I look at it closely is often simply lived for the sake of living. Indeed, Deleuze proposed that to write is to become and hence, the nearest thing to life itself (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p.43).

Ethical considerations

Fictional material, though fabricated, alludes to a “reality”. I aim in my writing to create a verisimilitude to my practice, with “real” circumstances only playing the role of inspirational touchstones. I do not use any direct events from client work. I have only been loosely inspired by themes in client work emerging over the last seven years of my practice. I am attentive to the fact that clients do not come to therapy to be written about (McLeod, 1996). Counselling and psychotherapy are delicate areas of research, in that the dialogue between client and counsellor, as well as any growth that happens in the process, is confidential to that relationship, as the work of counselling is always based on a significant vulnerability of the client and the honour of trust handed over to the counsellor willingly. Therefore, any research approach that encroaches into these areas of private therapeutic encounters, to try to encapsulate the intensity and intricacies of the “realities” of the work, produces with it the possibility of hindering therapy or even creating damage (MacLeod, 1996). This is my main rationale for creating a fictional client, as I do not wish to implicate any real clients in my research. The real clients I have worked with relate to the fictional client only through the symbolic representations they occupy in my mind. I do not believe that any direct material from any real clients has found its way into the final draft. Any identifying features of real clients that emerged in the writing process have been disguised or removed, to the best of my ability.

Implications for Clients

Clients who may read or know of my research will have access to some parts of my internal processing which they would not have otherwise known about. They would realise that I use my client work as inspiration for research. Although I have told all my clients that I am involved in academia and research in a general manner, I have been careful to speak about the kind of research I do in accordance with each

individual client's needs and capacities. Therefore, if clients become aware of my research, I suspect this may lead to some perplexity in those who may feel uncomfortable with it and perhaps even suspicious of my motives in therapy. So I attempt to show up for them to the best of my ability, address concerns and take responsibility for how my writing may affect them. Furthermore, as the creator of this piece of work, I have been mindful of what I included in and excluded from the final draft, knowing that clients may have access to my research, and that both the inclusion and exclusion of my writing data have implications for others and myself, as well as for academic integrity.

Ideally, I would have liked to seek consent from past and present clients to allow some of our work together to be used as inspiration for fictional writing in this research project. However, given the nature of boundaries around psychotherapeutic work, requesting consent for my research would create an extension beyond the therapeutic endings of some of these relationships, altering the relationship dynamics in unpredictable and possibly uncontained ways. This is a risk I chose not to take. For had I approached ongoing clients in the expectation of using our therapeutic work for research when I began this project; I believe it would have created a conflict of interest wherein keeping my research curiosities and interests independent of my clients' needs in therapy would have been complex territory to navigate.

My self-reflection in this piece may impact on my inner world in relation to clients, specifically my inner responses to the fictional client and my feelings about the profession of counselling. Clients would not normally know about my personal experiences at this depth. Knowing about my private life and inner thoughts could potentially shatter the image clients may have of me, particularly that of their therapist being somehow "unbreakable". It brings up important questions regarding a therapist's self-disclosure, such as "Who is it that benefits from therapy?" and "Should clients know about how they impact on their therapist?" I hold the stance

that psychotherapy is a joint endeavour and although the focus of the therapeutic work is on the client, the transformation and growth in myself as a therapist is inevitable and undeniable. To override this fact would be to dishonour my relationships with my clients as well as their influence as important human beings who take up space in my life. As a primarily person-centred therapist, I already allow my clients access to many parts of my internal processing, since congruence is central to my practice. Acknowledging their impression on me is a part of the valuing process that is fundamental to my work. So I do not believe that it would be entirely new information to most of my clients that they have had a profound influence on me. However, I carefully decide which disclosures are beneficial to the client and the relationship. This research is not geared to the individual needs of the clients. Not all clients may be ready or able to handle parts of me that they normally do not witness, such as my ambivalence towards counselling and clients at times. For this reason, I have explicitly stated that this research is aimed towards therapists and I have taken precautions to restrict access to my thesis at least for the first year after submission.

Clients may also be influenced to believe that they have burdened or even “destroyed” me. This could be painful, especially if it ties in with a re-enactment of early experiences of feeling too much or being hurtful to others. To clients who may feel this way, I would like to respond that my choice of being a therapist meets my own ego needs for importance and validation, and that working with my clients is of transformative value to me. Transformation can be painful but it is essential for me to live from a truer self. Clients may touch on pain that already exists and make me aware of it. This awareness, even if it comes through destruction and breakdown, is the most precious gift that makes this thesis and any academic and career achievements possible.

I acknowledge that there may be additional complexities, which I can only be

open and willing to explore as they arise. I hope to be genuinely available to them to address this, both in my writing as well as in my presence with them in a counselling room so that I can potentially be reduced to a more real yet fallible object that they can relate to internally. I believe that in this case I can only try to continue to be "good-enough" (Winnicott, 1960, p.590).

It is also possible that future clients may use knowledge of this research project to influence their decision of wanting to work with me or not. As much as a client may associate having a therapist who is involved in research with an assumption that it reflects increased knowledge in the field, it can also raise apprehensions about potentially being a "subject". For this reason, I am mindful of how I speak to clients about my research, if it becomes relevant to the therapeutic relationship to accommodate and respect these possible concerns, while also accepting that some clients may never be comfortable with having a therapist who is also a researcher.

The writing process is meant to be a disruptive and re-organising endeavour. It is intended to challenge narratives around power with regard to race, gender, and counsellor-client relationships. It has changed the way I practise. For one thing, I am much more attuned to issues of power in the counselling relationship. Sometimes I can find myself looking for aspects of my therapeutic work that link to my research, and I use my clinical supervisor and group supervision to help me identify when I do this, to discern whether it is of use to my clients and to keep it in check if need be.

Implications for myself

In the process of allowing my writing to lead me, I became increasingly aware that self-reflective writing of this nature could be emotionally intense for the researcher. It calls me to transformation, which was a challenging process. I did my

best to prioritise my wellbeing and that of my relationships with family, friends, and clients over my research aims. I have chosen to omit details of particular life experiences from my final draft, which could create an exposure I may not be ready for at this stage of my life. Furthermore, as I maintain a commitment to practising active self-care, I have allowed myself more latitude in leaning on friends and family for support. I hoped to be able to achieve a balance of separateness and togetherness with which to support myself during the writing process; however, at times it became more important to permit myself to lose balance and even break down in the process as well.

I pay a price in being a more exposed therapist and person in general. However, I hope to be one who is truer to herself as a result of the process. Nevertheless, I did not challenge myself to expose more than I thought I could handle safely.

Implications for family, friends and others

I also did not plan to write about details of my family members or friends explicitly. Experiences with others perhaps as memories did arise in my writing. After all, as an interconnected and interrelated social being, my story is “never made in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants” (Tolich, 2010, p. 1599). Their impact on me is inevitable and they will be a part of my process either as internalised objects or simply as influences on me as a person. My family members and close friends are the only people who are potentially recognisable due to the fact that my identity can be closely tied to theirs. I have done my best to mask or alter details and only speak for myself and not others. I occasionally mention “acquaintances”, “friends”, and a “therapist” who are also fictional, loosely drawing on many different people I have met in real life. One such “person” already mentioned is referred to simply as a “British man” and the content of his dialogue is

an amalgamation of various reactions I have received from a range of people regarding my ethnicity. I use my words for his dialogue, not any that I have heard verbatim. Any references to other “clients” are also fictional, drawing generally on a combination of experiences.

The process of this research has influenced my relationships, particularly with my family. A positive aspect is that my understanding of my experiences as collective, intergenerational and contextualised within a post-colonial aftermath has been an addition to my family dialogue about how we understand the story of our family. On the other hand, I notice that finding my personal and academic voice in research accelerates my individuation process with the family.

Research creates effect and change on many levels and for this reason I believe it is essential to be mindful of its consequences and revisit them over and over again in light of the responsibility I have to myself and others.

“Ironically, the office is often our refuge, where we can celebrate, albeit quietly, our achievements with our clients, where we feel good and noble about ourselves, deluding ourselves that we are leaving our anxieties out of the room. Again, paradoxically, we may not be. In order to feel this good at work we may be avoiding issues of anger and hate in our clients, their suggestions that nothing is being accomplished in therapy or that we are inattentive. We may steer clients down more comfortable lines of thought and discussion in order to avoid additional discomfort in ourselves.”

– Marie Adams (2014, p.71)

Chapter V: The client and the therapist

In writing Peter, I noticed how willingly I gave him characteristics and attributes that I would not so easily take on myself. His positioning in society allows him to be most of these roles I hand over to him. As is true of all fiction, I am inspired by events of my own life and subsequently events and general experiences in my counselling practice. In other states of being, usually states of complete panic and insecurity that I do not bring into the counselling room, I feel a lot like him. This is perhaps why I need to polarise him as white, British and male, juxtaposed to everything I am not. He is symbolic of the person through whose gaze I have always found myself imagining the world and more specifically myself. In embodying a certain 'British masculinity' (Nandy, 1982), he represents on the surface all that was put forward as an "ideal" man, both historically and currently in the world today. Even his name, although it appeared arbitrarily as I wrote, seems symbolic when I think back to the choice of name. My mind goes to Peter, the "rock", the apostle of Christ who briefly walked on water and one of the first leaders of the early Christian church in Europe; in direct contrast to my own name Thomas, the sceptic and "doubter" and the apostle who started the early St. Thomas Christian tradition in South India – which is where I find my roots. The only two aspects we have in common is our age, as we were born only a few days apart, though across the world from each other.

I make no attempt to analyse Peter's life story or create a clinical formulation for him. Instead I have created a dialogue between extremes and I hope this discussion can allow for an acknowledgement of the value in experiencing our selves in polarities. Polarities are two seemingly contrasting positions that can equalize each other. Polarities and the notion of interdependency have survived through history. The Taoist "yin-yang" figure, for example, shows reciprocal energies and the

recognition that being is made up of both. I do realise that not everyone understands or experiences him/herself as possessing either end of a polarity (such as eastern or western, masculine or feminine). We can often feel like combinations of these polarities or as though none of them apply to us. It is not my intention to exclude those who do not see themselves in these or privilege one way of viewing identity over others, but simply to uncover the splits that thwarted my attempts to experience any sense of a whole self until I began to construct them as polarities in my writing. This could be viewed as a development from splitting. Splitting was first described by Freud in his work on fetishes and pathological grief, where he referred to a mental process by which two distinct and clashing versions of reality could co-exist (Lipson, 1963, p. 105). Splitting can lead to stark simplifications, in which something or someone is viewed as good or bad, rather than appreciated as more complex and nuanced. Indeed, Klein (1996, pp. 166-167) noticed how the ability to hold extreme contradictions in the same plane of thought is at best tricky though usually unbearable, considering how tempting splitting can be.

Splitting works to avoid the exertion of resolving opposing thoughts or feelings by simply switching between extreme positions. Everything is definite, such as right and wrong, good and evil, until it becomes useful to believe the complete reverse of that position. In the paranoid/schizoid position (characterised by splitting) severe guidelines exist that may alter from day to day or moment to moment and that keep other people demonised. I believe some amount of splitting exists in my writing as well. For instance, this may become particularly evident in my preoccupation with how the white man views me, an idea that has seeped into my blood and bones for centuries. As much as I do not want to admit it, specifically not to white or male readers for fear of handing over more power, I cannot deny that this constant watching of myself through an imagined and more privileged white male gaze, keeps me in check. With Peter, this gaze is always present and personified as a “client”

who watches me. As a client looks at me and takes me into his internal world, I become available to use, as he needs me to be, within certain limits in the physical world of course, but with no limits in the psyche. Yet, the memory of appropriation and use that I hold in the cells of my body resists this therapeutic goal at times. As I write Peter I bring him partially into my own gaze as well, disrupting a foundational narrative of how stories should proceed and even how therapy should look. The other power dynamics of the client-counsellor relationship also exist, wherein the client is increasingly vulnerable because the focus of the narrative of healing and repair is on him. The counsellor holds back a lot of her own distress and life story, and positions herself as some sort of an “expert” helper, within the context of the complicated and oppressive history of mental health care.

These power influences do not cancel each other out but swing back and forth. Yet, it is in the fleeting moments of tense equilibrium between Peter and myself that we meet. We represent different aspects of the same being and various nuances in the same mosaic of life. The intensity of our separateness and togetherness speaks to the shifts in consciousness that allow for and necessitate all ways of being.

A piece of him

Peter seems as if he doesn't care for consequences; he is often scared but likes to appear entitled, self-serving and careless with the hearts of others. He is young, and youth can be arrogant about what it knows about life. I should know because I am that way too. Yet he tells me that his relationship is in shambles and he is deeply lonely but cannot admit it to anyone because he has to appear strong when he feels weak. He has profound questions about his existence that are of monumental significance but he never acknowledges them because he says he feels like a stupid hippie when he does. He also dissociates, though he calls it “shutting down”, and at

times also feels deeply inadequate. So what happened to Peter to make him hurt so much?

He will not tell me anything beyond “The same sort of shit that happens to most men. Nobody lets you feel your feelings and all that malarkey”. So I suppose I have to wrestle the rest out of him.

He can be awful to me as I try to write about him. He makes me angry because I can feel he plays mind games and laughs at me. I cannot figure him out. I have created him and yet he makes himself the main character and assigns me to his shadow side. But then again, this is therapy and he should be the main focus, so I am confused by my anger and judge myself for wanting centre stage. I think about how the therapist's unconscious desire for feelings of importance can result in exploitative dynamics in therapy (Adams, 2014, pp. 126-127) that go unseen by the therapist due to her own defences, and I feel ashamed. I remind myself that I must watch my need for power closely and keep it reined in.

My problem is that I can find myself falling in love with the guy. That is not a shock to me; I tend to fall for men like him, the ones who always make me feel just out of reach of being good enough. He makes sure of letting me know that he shouldn't be with his wife. Perhaps he knows he has me hooked when he says that. His thinking fascinates and exhausts me. There are magnificent detours and loopholes to Peter's logic and I struggle to find a gap in his intellect. I could do with just a tiny little space in his exceedingly sophisticated mind, where I could wedge myself in and say, *Look! Your excellent reason has a little problem here. Its foundation is completely false!*

I try to remind myself that he will see it himself soon enough and that my unearthing the base of all his beliefs right now is not doing him any favours. So I continue to play the game with him – nudging him towards that little inconsistency he did not see and pretending to know less than I do so that I do not scare him away.

The whole process is chipping away at my own ego and getting me quite angry.

So like a man to think he is always right! I think to myself.

To my analytical mind, his persistent need to be right is the problem. I could see why he thinks he needs to be right, and how hard it was to see beyond right and wrong. He said that he found in me someone who was willing to see life from his perspective and so assumed that I was also willing to say that he was always right. The bit that caught me off guard was how badly I wanted to believe he was right myself. I wanted him to be the innocent virtuous victim, as much as he wanted me to see him that way.

I want to scream at him, **“stop playing me!”** Instead, right in the middle of one of his endless self-deprecating rants, I blurted out “I don’t believe you, Peter”.

He looks stunned and responds, “You don’t believe me; what do you mean? I’m telling you how I feel; what is not to believe?”

“I do not think you actually – and I mean deep down not just on the surface – believe that you are a waste of space and a complete ‘fuck-up’ to use your words. I am not convinced that you actually believe that. I also do not buy the idea that you believe that you are repulsive to women or incapable of an intelligent conversation. Because, as we have established before, none of that is actually true, when we have broken it down and actually looked at it.” The words rush out of me: “I think you want me to think that you think that about yourself. Somehow it seems to make you a better person if you don’t see your worth. I think you care more about what I think of you than what you think of you so you will say anything necessary.”

Shut up now Natasha, less is more. But my mouth kept going, seemingly devoid of any connection to my brain.

“I think you are trying to get inside my head, Peter, and control how I think of you. It feels like you are trying to manage your image with every sentence.” I say, “It must be absolutely exhausting trying to be in both our heads at once. I am trying to understand what you are doing, but I am lost. It is like you go on autopilot – beating yourself down to a pulp in a practised habitual way that doesn’t seem to have any life to it. Every time we get to something real – every time you find some relief, the self-flagellation starts again. It looks like every time I really see you as you are, every time you ease into yourself, this wall of ‘I-am-a-useless-piece-of-shit’ comes up and I cannot reach you anymore. You have me back in my place, which is a safe mile away from you. It’s getting me a bit angry to say the truth, because you set all the rules here.”

As I watched his face fall, I still could not stop myself from relentlessly trying to drive the point home.

Why are you trying to destroy him? Easy now, you will break him.

I could hear my supervisor's gentle voice in my head as I imagine what she would say about him.

"Why don't you believe him? Doesn't it make sense that there has been no one around to hold an accurate mirror up to him?"

A stab of guilt... I mumble some sort of regret as I ask if I have said too much.

Excruciating pause.

Too much and too soon.

He is going to get up and leave now.

Silence

More silence

I must pierce it.

"I went off on a rant there. I think I was being quite insensitive", I apologise.

"Yeah, you were holding that in for a long time", he finally responded.

"I think you are right, I was and I should have thought it through

first", I confessed.

"This is all a bit much for me... give me a second." His eyes glaze over – it feels cold and empty in the room. He is suddenly so far away.

Silence again

"Peter, are you still with me?" I check with him.

"Yeah, I'm here", he whispers, blinking furiously.

"I'm right here too, Peter. Take a moment to breathe deeply. Look around at the colours around you. Feel the fabric of the chair under your fingers. We are here in the counselling room together."

He does not listen to me and instead closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.

"I made you jolt out of yourself again?" I ask carefully.

He nods and takes a few more deep breaths.

"I'm sorry. For now, I will back out of your space. I may have touched on something you perhaps do not want me to see? Or something you do not want anyone to see... Or maybe I got it all wrong?"

"Everything you just said was a bit strange but there is some truth to it. I don't want you to dislike me. And I was not aware I was doing this, for sure... I didn't even realise. Fuck... Okay. Let me see if I have got this. Yeah, I really want you to think I am a good person. Not someone who is stuck-up anyway. I want you

to think that I don't like myself at all. That sounds twisted, but I didn't mean it that way. I was pretty convinced I hated myself too. But now I'm suddenly not so sure. Perhaps I just hate myself so that others will like me. No, I think there is more to it as well. I think I hate myself so that no matter how others may see me I won't be too disappointed. It's a self preservation thing."

"You are protecting yourself?"

He opens his eyes and answers, "Yeah... see if I liked myself and others didn't that would destroy me. Can you imagine the embarrassment? Walking around thinking you are all that and then someone brings you crashing to the ground – reminds you that you are really worth nothing." He winced at the thought.

"That fear comes from experience then?" I probe.

"For sure", he begins, but then appears to decide not to give me any more details. "But this is starting to clear up a bit and I am so embarrassed that you are seeing it. Yes, that isn't me! I am starting to see that it is an act. I am a bit annoyed with you for blowing my cover, because it is scary to think what I could be if not someone who hated himself. Am I making sense? This is mortifying. What must you be thinking of me? You must think I'm completely pathetic. I'm manipulating people – no, just women – into feeling sorry for me."

I struggle to figure out how to diffuse the shame so I ask, "Would it help if I told you exactly what I'm thinking? That way you don't have to go off into that spiral of imagining what I must be thinking. I know I may not be able to convince you that I'm telling the truth, however."

"Yes, it may help. I don't know. You tend to put on a performance too and play it overly nice sometimes."

"You are right about that. So I'll try to be as genuine as I can. I think it is scary to admit that you are trying to get women to feel sorry for you. I don't

think I have the courage to admit something like that to myself and much less to someone else so I'm stunned at what you said. I felt a little played at first, for sure, in the beginning of the session and a bit annoyed. But right now I am feeling rather in awe of what you were able to say."

"I could possibly believe that. I'm not sure. Are you always this dramatic when you talk?" He laughs.

I smile along, although I am now feeling silly about the whole thing and embarrassed at how I handled it all.

But before I had the time to go off into my own spiral of self-criticism, I hear him say, "So tell me this: if I don't really dislike myself that much and it really is 'a wall', as you put it, then what the hell is behind the wall?"

"Now that is a terrifying thought," a voice deep inside me responds, using my mouth.

"Yes it really is."

He smirks to himself as if he had just figured out something. Somewhere in that interchange I felt that I really met him and now my head is spinning. He had cut too close to the bone. I realised that I was as scared as he was; only I believed I could not show it. I had to appear as if I knew what was behind the wall, even though I did not have a clue. Did he notice? The psychotherapist is meant to hold the space and be a container for the client. She takes him in, and reflects back to him how he has affected her, allowing him thus to see himself more clearly and more authentically, perhaps for the first time (Bollas, 2018, p. 37). Perhaps a congruent response allowing him to know that he had touched the most frightened parts of me as well would allow him a new way of meeting himself. I did not have the courage to do that; I imagined too many things that could potentially go wrong. He could think I was inept and unable to hold his distress. He could leave therapy

and the idea of being left triggered ancient fears in me. *But this is not about me!* I convince myself that I must be empty and ready to receive him, not add my own fears to his, for I remember reading that a therapist who has too much going on in herself leaves little room for the individuality of the client (Wosket, 1999). I could use my emptiness as a therapeutic skill, I tell myself. Here is where my hard-won ability to become invisible comes into use. I scold myself. *This needs to be just about him not me! Do your job for heaven's sake.* I now feel so distant from him that I can hardly hear what he is saying. How did I get this so wrong, when I tried so hard?

A piece of me

Occasionally I am struck by a single question, which I can only best articulate with the words “What is anything?” It is a question I can only hold in my mind at its absolute depth for about 10 seconds, beyond which it feels utterly unbearable. I can feel that I have lost my mind and body when I dwell on this question. It is as if everything around me completely disappears and I’ll fall into pitch darkness. What is existence anyway? What is all of this? As I keep asking, I come to a moment of absolute nothingness – where I am sure nothing exists and all thought stops because the thinker does not exist. I do not know if other people ponder this question or if there is something fundamentally wrong in my thinking. However, if we all do think about this, how can we bear to collectively keep ignoring the question on a daily basis and go on with the rest of our “lives”? The question horrified me when I was younger, but at times in the depths of my despair brought me great peace. There is something soothing about knowing that the absolute darkness waits for me and for all of this.

I have often been accused of not being in touch with reality. Peter has said this to me as well. “Do you even know how the world works? Are you so sheltered in your world of theories that you just stay in this office all day and hear about life from your clients? Don’t you realise there is a world out there outside your own head?”

I think he is right: I do not really know who I am beyond the helper role. Over the last five years, a lot of my perceptions and ideas about my self and life in general have been turned on their head. In terms of how the “outside world” has impacted on me, this involved painful losses, moving abroad and then back home, the breakdown of many relationships, starting and losing a couple of “great” jobs, and a revaluation of my own life story and personal philosophies. It has also

involved grappling with soul-crushing loneliness. So I find it hard to own any particular identity. Yet, I believe that this lack of a particularly defined “self” somehow serves me in this inquiry. The emptiness allows space for something to come to exist. There is an old Indian adage, that thinkers and theorists must debate and argue with questions and reasoning, until both fall silent and it is in that defeated, awestruck silence that the *Brahman* (The ultimate truth or reality) is revealed. So in that little gap, where after a lot of thinking, reading, learning, listening, speaking and arguing nothing makes sense anymore, there is silence. In that nothingness – I begin.

I've been watching myself my whole life. Sometimes I'm watching from a distance. I have often thought that my soul jumped out of my body in fright. I couldn't tell you exactly where she went, though I could say for certain that she was gone. I would find myself blinking in disbelief, rubbing my eyes, trying to return. More recently, through meditative practice, I have also been watching myself from what seems like within myself. Though if I try to articulate more closely to experience, even when I watched myself from afar, I did not feel that I was outside myself so much as that my “self” was a vast place and I had just moved to one corner of it somewhere out in the sky above my body. This idea intrigued me – so when I felt as if I did not inhabit my body, I still felt that I was in me. What could this mean? That everything was me. That thought feels blasphemous. It sounds conceited for someone to say that she is everything. Yet there are moments when I don't fully buy the idea that I am a little being in a big universe. It feels more like I am the birds, the flowers, the animals, the teapot. Bizarre. Perhaps narcissistic. Maybe I do not have the ego strength to function. Yet if I said I felt this while I was meditating, praying or otherwise following some set out spiritual guidelines, it would seem okay. So what is the difference between feeling that spiritual oneness and my dissociative episodes? I

could use the same words to describe them both. I have often wondered if it is the same mechanism. Yet they feel so drastically different. They feel like polarised experiences with somehow the same core. The experiences I have labelled as dissociation seem to be physically felt in my head, a sort of numbness behind my face. That particular spacing out feels exhausting, confusing and sometimes harrowing. It is an expansion of my head up into the clouds. I am everything but my body in those experiences. On the other hand, the moments of oneness feel more like an expansion of my heart and my womb. My awareness moves out of the core of my body and into everything else. There are few words there, just deep bliss.

So I get up and dance. I swirl around in a long skirt across the living room and sing aloud like a little girl. Something brittle and coarse in me breaks apart in my chest and I feel free after years. I wish I could be like this more often. I have grown weary of how serious I have become. I am split wide open for a minute. And then it all comes crashing back. All the problems, all the pain of my ancestors and all the shame floods my heart.

I keep writing. I keep coming back. I have to come back; what is the point then? Is the point of life pleasure, is it suffering? Is it finishing off bad karma? What is it exactly?

Is this all about this fucking terrible rage! I have been angry for a long time. It turned inwards and corroded my intestines as I wrote. Sometimes I am angry with God, and at other times God is all I have. What kind of mean trick is this? I'm tired of trying to prove to the world that I am smart or that I am good. I am selfish and hurting and I don't want to pretend otherwise. I would rather be a wounded howling animal in a corner.

But I am a therapist. Perhaps this is also because I want to show others that I

am good. Trying to be good has now become a career for me. Through a twisted logic, it gives me a sense of empowerment when I take the one thing I have, the ability to empathise and listen, which was the soft bit of me that was abused and exploited, and turn it on its head. I can now let myself be used but on my terms – within boundaries, with pay (well, sometimes), and always with some respect. I once spoke to a sex worker who told me something similar. It is unfair to compare my pain to hers, so I make the comparison in kind, only not in degree or intensity. She was trafficked as a little girl, and then as an adult went back to the brothels but this time on her own terms, asking for her own price and deliberately picking the men she sold her body to. She learned the skill, albeit through abuse, and now she made it her own.

“I envy people who know who they are. I am everything and nothing at the same time”, Peter once said to me. His words ring in my head as my own as I sit in front of my new therapist. I speak politely and calmly while I can almost see a blood-red wave of anger toppling him off his chair. *He symbolises everything that keeps me in my place.* I think to myself,

He doesn't understand me. He doesn't have a clue.

A soft child's voice wants to ask – *Can you bear me? In all my blood and fury, would I still be acceptable?*

At the end of the session he leans forward and says gently, “You really want to be seen”.

I am silent.

I do really want to be seen, and yet I couldn't explain to him that it was the “nothingness” in me I wanted seen. So I settle for being invisible, because how could you see nothing. I have made a career out of being somewhat invisible. I have been a

psychotherapist for the last seven years. What a bizarre profession! What kind of person does this in their twenties? Always standing in the shadows of people's lives. So close to them and yet so far. Sometimes I feel like some of my clients see me as only half a person. At other times I wonder if being half a person in people's lives suits me well. At times I have tried to convince myself that my professional life was not my life really – that somehow the relationships with my clients, though intense and meaningful, were not real like my other relationships. Not real? That doesn't make much sense, as it is the raw reality of the relationships that keeps me hooked. These are stark naked encounters in measured doses, that are not enough to completely engulf me. Relationships that are crazy, but crazy in small doses. Just enough to give me my fix for the day, so that I can turn off the madness that is my mind, and allow vulnerability some space in my world again just for a few hours. I often hear things like something Peter once said in the depths of his despair, "Nobody listens to me but you. But even you don't really count; this is your job, I am paying you to listen to me".

I assumed it was a way to prove a point or create a distance from the truth that someone is actually listening and that he is in fact worth listening to. Nonetheless, statements like that can hurl me into the ancient wound of women – *I do not count* – not as a real person surely, and to make it worse not even a whole woman. I know it is a necessary condition for the therapeutic work, as it is for the other work of women, to be what he needs me to be. It's not unusual for me as a woman to notice that our love is meant to exist independently of the rest of our being, certainly separate from our so "inappropriate" bodies, as in the roles of mother, wife, lover and whore. So I cannot help wondering whether I am prostituting my presence in this vocation – no, more like – *Am I prostituting my love?*

I am suddenly aware that I can overhear a young man near me speaking to his

girlfriend, as I am writing right now.

I hear him claim with self-assurance, “Women face this ridiculous idea of how they want to be treated which they get from their mothers and fashion magazines! They don’t really know what they want. Take you, for example: you don’t ask for too much like other girls and that’s why I like you. You don’t feel too much or get upset by the things I say ...”

I force myself to tune out of this monologue for fear that I may lose restraint. The young woman, listening to him, with long dark hair and a heavy fringe, holds on to a tired smile and nods her head over and over again. *She’s okay*, I say to pacify myself, *perhaps I imagined the dark hollow behind her eyes, and it is probably just all that eyeliner she is wearing that is bringing out a watery quality to her eyes.*

I think he sees me looking at her so I pull myself in again, determined to become more invisible.

“*Can the subaltern speak?*” The voice in my head is now quoting Spivak (1988). “*Of course she can! Watch yourself speak!*”

I am aware of the big gaping hole, a void torn open between my breasts, where love should have been. Now it just echoes with the whispers of shame, the rattling of regret, and the constant screams of pain. I am caged in my own sorrow.

I am afraid of what people who read this will think. *How is this deranged woman allowed to see clients?*

And then all of a sudden normal life happens – conversations, smiles, text messages. And I feel okay; I look over what I have written and I wonder who wrote that. Why was I so dramatic?

I want to vomit now.

I don't want to write anymore. I hate this.

How am I supposed to organise all this material and how is it supposed to make sense?

Writing as a form of inquiry? What the fuck does that mean?

Every time I try to write all I find is pain. And more pain.

I don't feel like I have the right to write this. I have lived a rather privileged life in many ways. There are people, right outside my door, eating out of rubbish bins. Yet I have the audacity to feel trapped. Stuck and suffocating. I cannot trust any source of nurturing and comfort. I am drawn to people who hurt me. Yet at other times I feel so free that I can choose anything, any path, any idea as long as I don't think about how I am viewed by others. Unfortunately I never stop thinking about how others see me.

There is terror inside.

I present myself as someone who can help people with their problems.

But I am as afraid as my clients and as afraid as most children.

Perhaps more.

I thought I was a bad person. Too fat, too ugly, too much. I was called the fat bitch that nobody wanted to play with. I took it for granted that nobody could love

me unless I changed. Maybe I could be loved if I were thinner, maybe if I had fewer opinions. My hair was too curly and wild, my skin too dark. I assumed I repulsed people. I repulsed myself. I realised early on that I was a smart girl and not a pretty one – you couldn't be both. So I have to work hard at being as smart as I possibly can to get any attention. That is the only way I'll get anywhere in life. I cannot depend on a man, I told myself. I should not depend on a man. Too many women depend on men for self-worth. So I cannot. Somewhere inside I still do, but I try not to listen to that. It's shameful. What self-respecting feminist would admit that inside she wishes a man would come save her? I certainly do not!

Or do I?

I thought someone would come save me by now. No one is here yet. No heroes, no knights, no men, no boys. I thought they would come anyway; I thought I could say, "No thank you, I'm an independent woman". But there is no one to say that to.

Men are disappointing. Women are scary. I am alone.

As I spiral into the excruciating pain of feeling unworthy, I notice that it feels never-ending. It feels like death would be welcome at this point. Death feels comforting. Then suddenly I am struck by a bizarre thought. I wonder why thinking of myself as unworthy feels so terrible. Surely if all of me believed this, there would be no conflict within me and so no suffering. It would simply be a fact that I was just not a good, smart or desirable person. I would be at peace with the idea if it felt true to my whole being. But it does not. Something small and steady deep inside me vehemently objects to all of this, while the self-hating part of me remains stubborn and at war. So there is a bit of me that wants to live and wants to be myself,

untouched by societal discourses and refusing to buy any of my excuses for why I am unacceptable. So that little self-assured, glowing, dancing bit, which I can sometimes call my soul is what is causing the problems here, or maybe pulling me to an alternate reality to the one society offers. Rogers would probably reduce it to the actualising tendency (1959). Winnicott would possibly say that it was the elusive True Self (Winnicott, 1965). For sure there is truth in there, deep in that little thing – absolute truth from its own perspective. So when I was told as a child that *Namaste* in Sanskrit meant “the God in me greets the God in you”, was this what they meant? That when we meet – truly meet each other – it is not our egos or our false selves that meet but those core bits, where we are all okay. We meet right in there where we are not better or worse than each other, or more or less deserving of life. I always found this the fundamental difference between the many “God” conversations I had in the east and the west. It seemed so hard for me break past the idea of God as an old man in the sky watching over us in judgement when I consider a western lens or at times even the westernised Christian lens I was schooled in. So in those illusory states when I find it hard to look up to the heavens and see their magnificence, I can dig deep into myself, often into my own pain, and I am struck by the presence of something, perhaps someone. Someone, who is listening to all the thoughts in my head. This presence is, in the broadest sense of the word, myself and yet also not the self I present to others, or perhaps not myself at all. I land smack in the middle of that truth.

Jesus said the truth would set me free. Strangely enough it does. The pain ceases and the crying stops. I am okay.

Chapter VI: The Fearful Self

I kneel down in front of a white Mother Mary, gaze upon her blue robes to match her blue eyes, her bowed head, her blond hair, her delicate arms carrying her child, her foot placed on top of a snake. It reminds me of the time I almost stepped on a snake as a child. In the darkness, I thought it was a stick, until my foot stopped on its own, hovering about an inch above her head, as though Mother Mary herself grabbed my ankle. I leaped backwards. I remember not being afraid of the snake in the moment, just enamoured of the way she moved her body, and moving back out of sheer instinctual reverence. The watchman came by and shooed us back home. Most snakes are not poisonous, someone had said to me previously, but he wasn't waiting to find out. My sister and I ran home as quickly as our little feet could carry us so we did not have to see what happened next. I cried when I saw blood swirling around in a puddle of water the next day. I had killed the snake.

I try to wipe the memory out and stare harder into Mary's face. It isn't working. A quote from my course readings runs through my mind, almost as if my dependence on intellectualisation is now having a laugh at me:

"Depression is the fear of loving lest one's hate should destroy. Schizoid aloofness is the fear of loving lest one's love should destroy, which is far worse" (Guntrip, 1952, p. 90).

I want to cry. Instead, an irritation builds up in me and I decide it is easier to be angry with a statue than with myself – *"I could bet my life she didn't actually look like that"*, a cynical voice inside me chimes in. So I shut my eyes. I feel cool air fill my lungs, tumble out of my nose and effortlessly roll back into my chest again.

I settle back on my knees and ask the good mother to take care of my clients. Some of their names and faces flash before me. Their stories swim in front of my closed eyes. I hope they are well or at least I hope they are coping. I pray that they are protected. I try to leave them at the altar, leave them with her.

Through a little gap in my thoughts, Peter rushes in. My body, filled with his despair and hopelessness, crumbles back onto the pew.

“What would you have me do?” I ask.

A quiet voice in my left ear whispers “You are thinking too much, leave it up to me.”

The fear that I may fall into Peter's never-ending abyss of despair weighs on my heart as I walk up to receive him in the waiting area. Being with him reminds me of what it was like staring down the well in my grandparents' old house in Kerala: the feel of the cool, dusty, sturdy grey stone against my fingers counteracting the scorching sun on the back of my head and the lurching, nauseating sensation of my intestines rolling around as I peered down into the infinite blackness. I would drop stones into the well and be aghast that I couldn't even hear them land in the water below. Even more horrifyingly to my tiny mind, a sunburnt bare-chested man would occasionally come by to clean the well. He would wrap his legs around the metal bucket, flash a big smile at the children watching, grab the jute ropes around the pulley with his powerful muscular arms and slowly descend into what I imagined was the earth's mantle to unclog some piece of debris down there. The bravest human being I ever met. “Will he go down to the core of the earth?” I asked. “Won't

that cause a volcano?" I was impressed with my own intelligence at this point in my life.

"No, of course not, darling. Wells don't go that deep."

I still do not fully believe this.

Session 20

The sun shines through the window and illuminates Peter's face. He stoically bears the glare for a few seconds and then shields his eyes with his left hand. A flash of his physical existence in front of me brought me back to the present moment and away from his words. Instead of inhabiting the memories of his past, I was suddenly watching the light define the shape of his lips as they moved, the untidy stubble on his jaw, the bend of the inside of his wrist, the shadows sketched by his large fingers over his eyebrows.

"Oh the sun's in your eyes; shall I get the blinds?" I ask.

"Yeah... please..."

I stand by the window with my back to him and fumble with the cords, awkwardly aware that he is watching me. The cords are tangled and stuck behind the radiator. Then with a crash, the blinds slide down knocking over a vase on the windowsill.

"Right, I'm killing the flowers now."

He chuckles as I bend over to pick up it up. "Rather them than me", he says.

For heaven's sake go back and sit down, Natasha I think to myself.

"Okay then, is that better, Peter? ... You were saying – your mother?"

"Yes", the smile wipes off his face quickly, "I have been thinking recently that I

don't really think she ever wanted me. I think that is what this horrible feeling is. I can hardly remember being a child. But I remember that I hurt her; I think I destroyed her really. The more I think about it the more annoyed I get. They were all wrong, my mum and dad; they should have never been married. They should have never had me. It should have never happened."

"You should have never happened?"

"Well, I have said it to myself so many times, that it has really lost its value. I suppose that is what I am saying. They should never have happened so I should never have happened. That is so messed up... But yeah... I don't think I should have been born. I messed everything up even further. They should have never had children; they did not know what they were doing. I did not know what I was doing. Everything is such a blur and I don't even know what happened. All I know is that I keep trying to be the right person for her in a way. I do everything I do so that it appears like she has done a good enough job. I am protecting her in a way. If she knew how much she hurt me with her helplessness, she wouldn't be able to handle it. So I must turn out right. That's why everything seems so fake. Even my relationship with Gina right now is just what is supposed to happen. So I'm in it."

"Wait a minute, so you are saying you are in this relationship because that is what your mother would want so that she wouldn't feel like she failed you as a mother? "

"Yes ... When you say it that way, it sounds so messed up. And yes, I think that is true. That's the reason we are together I think. I am supposed to earn a certain amount and appear like a functioning adult. I am supposed to want to settle down with someone so here I am – making sure my mother does not feel like she failed."

He rubs his eyes and rests his face in his palms.

“That being said, Gina isn’t exactly my mother’s sort of person.” He speaks through his fingers: “Mum’s really intimidated by her. Gina has her own mind and is independent. That scares my mother. She sort of backs off from us when she is around the both of us, because Gina can be vicious.”

“So you have done what you think your mother would want you to do on the surface, but below that you have picked a partner who challenges her authority?”

“Do you think Gina is protecting me from something? Fuck... yeah I think it’s a bit like that.”

“Yes, that, and you are rebelling – it is subversive for sure, yet you are disrupting your mother’s power over you?”

“Sub-what? Say that again? For an Indian woman you try too hard to talk like the effing BBC.” He laughs to himself.

That stung. *Could I ever get it right for these people? Would I always be made into a mockery?* It is exhausting to be constantly aware of how I speak and to clear out my accent and mannerisms to make myself relatable, and less of a joke to the British. He is right, I do try too hard. But I don’t want to admit it, least of all to him.

Would I constantly be stuck vacillating between being a silent, grovelling subordinate and a verbose, laughable mimic?

I took a sharp inhalation that nipped my throat raw as I tried to conceal my discomfort.

Congruence, I remind myself. Well, Rogers was a white man. Of course, he had the privilege of congruence.

Think therapeutically. Not personally, not politically. Think about what is happening between the two of you.

My heart hurts but I ignore it and say,

“Okay, I think you don’t face people directly, so you go against them undercover, so that they cannot call you up on it. But they can surely feel the effect of your anger towards them; they just can’t blame you for it. Sometimes it’s through a jibe and a laugh, like right now with me, and at other times it’s through making them think you are doing exactly what they want you to but actually doing the opposite. So they pay for forcing you, like with your mother and your wife. Either way you do make sure you make your mark. But, no one can really identify what you did and you don’t have to face the consequences of confronting them.”

I feel nauseated. I hold down the growing urge to slap him across that white cheek I was looking at so tenderly a few minutes ago. It took everything in my power to speak calmly and yet I am certain that the venom has passed through the both of us despite my efforts.

“It was easier when I was watching you kill the flowers”, he said with a smile.

*“Come back my soul, how much longer
will you linger in the garden of deceit?
I have sent you a hundred messages
I have shown you a hundred ways
either you never read them or you ignore my advice.
Come back my soul, do not waste time with the cold-hearted
they do not know your worth.
Why do you seek water when you are the stream?
Have you forgotten? You are the king's falcon,
you are a ray of the Beloved, a divine wonder!”*

– Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi

(Quoted from Mafi, Farzad & Kolin, 2012, p. 2)

Chapter VII: The Dissociated Self: Bits and Pieces

I once had a friend who took her own life when we were both teenagers; now she is a spirit. She was convinced, according to her suicide note, that she was “not of this world”, and took a macabre piece of my teenage self with her as she left – a part of me that lay bleeding on the marble floor as she did when her body was found. She returns to me in my dreams, where I often find myself grabbing her by her absurd, brown oversized man’s shirt and shaking her, screaming, *You are supposed to be dead! What are you doing here?* She doesn’t speak, just smiles with an enviable contentment spread across her young face. At other times she returns in my wakeful states and stands behind me, placing her hand on my left shoulder. I greet her happily, saying “Look it got so much better! Do you have any idea what you are missing?” She doesn’t reply so I continue speaking, “Did you have the same troublesome feeling while you were alive that something is missing and you know it is not what you are certain it is? Do you know that point where you lose yourself in paradox – and there is nothing and yet everything, where words cease and you know what you need but your thoughts can’t get you there? Did you ever feel this, is that why you chose to die? Or is it just me?” She squeezes my shoulder but says nothing.

She is lovely to have around, but she isn’t very useful as far as spirits go. She had a pointless death and now, apparently, has a pointless afterlife.

I often leave a session with Peter feeling dazed out. What did I actually say to him? I could not remember. A familiar old way of being. This spaced-out feeling was not just something I had picked up from him; it was also something that lived in me for years. I could drift off quite well. Few people would actually notice that I was not there. Did Peter notice?

My soul is flighty, she cannot be trusted to stay. She is somewhat aware of the pervasive disregard of non-dominant bodies (for example, non-white, non-male, non-abled, etc.) and she has no care for the fact that I only have a right within the dominant discourse when I gain an identity from the dominant group. She is on her own path of purpose and that involves having or not having a body as she pleases. She is vaguely aware that, in the patriarchal cultures she engages with, women's bodies and the female form are often viewed solely in terms of being objects of pleasure for men (Orbach, 2009, p. 119). When she sees this up close she takes umbrage and graciously leaves; she will have none of it.

Sometimes, I need someone to draw me back into the present, to remind me that I came attached with a body that interacted with other people, that I existed on this physical plane. It does not mean I don't do the things I am supposed to. I can actually get stuff done quite well, when I am only partly focussed here. If I need to I can phonetically remember a conversation after I pop back in and then I usually need a minute to play it back in my mind and actually listen to it this time around. It can be an eerie feeling when I realise that I have been away. Sometimes it is plain embarrassing, as consciously coming back seems to take considerable, sometimes noticeable effort. Occasionally, I have the confusing feeling of not wanting to come back. For in the moment, the desire to float off into the universe and leave my body behind seems like the most natural thing in the world. The best way I can describe it is that it is similar to why I am afraid of heights. It is not the spinning, dizzy sensations or the fear of what will happen if I fall that scares me the most, but the most singular insane thought, which madly enough I seem to entertain in the moment, that says *jump*.

I often experience my own sensations of disconnect as a "floating out of myself", at other times as a "lifting out" from the top of my head, or a spacing out so

surreal that my body continued as a shell of a person, leaving me watching from the end of a long tunnel. I sometimes understand this as my soul being jolted out, or at other times respectfully bowing out of a situation she wanted nothing to do with anymore and wandering the skies instead. A part of me fantasises that this ability means I can meet my client's disembodied essence in the spaces between our bodies. Cameron (2013; 2015) presents a similar idea, when she explores subtle transactions in the therapeutic encounter. She understands psychological contact with a person-centred formulation as the experiences of *extending forward* to meet a client in the space between. She makes nuanced distinctions between the difficult-to-name internal sensations of *extending* and *contracting*, *lifting up* (an expression I often use for myself), and *collapsing down* (Cameron, 2015). She conceptualises this in language that alludes to a presence or energy inside that moves towards or away from others in practised ways that are sometimes deliberate and sometimes unconscious, but often sensed by the other.

My training in psychology primed me to view my clients' experiences and my own as an intrinsic response to terror and on-going stress, associated with the third and final freeze option when the fight-or-flee response is no longer possible, resulting in a catatonic "playing dead" (Sinason & Silver, 2008), and as losing contact with the body and its sensations (Price, 2007; Vanderlinder et al., 1993). Price (2007) characterised it as the feeling of being "cut-off" from the body, suggesting that bodily experience is not incorporated into the sense of self, and as the avoidance of internal experience (Price & Thompson, 2007). Sar and Ozturk (2007) propose a model of dissociation that attributes the phenomenon to detachment (varying in extremity) of the "psychological self" from the "sociological self". The experience of trauma speeds up the development of the sociological self, which operates as a

bridge between the self and others, allowing the individual to function in society and create connections between the inner and outer worlds, while keeping the psychological self (a more core-like inner self) safe and protected. Holmes et al. (2005), in their review of the literature, proposed that a distinction should be made between two distinct processes of dissociation: detachment and compartmentalisation. They define detachment as an altered state of consciousness defined by a sense of separation from the self or the world. Compartmentalisation, by contrast, is characterised by incapacity to purposefully control actions or cognitive processes that one would generally be able to control, although the compartmentalised material remains intact and may even function independently in an altered state of awareness (for example, in the case of people who experience dissociated identities).

It is of course much more humane to understand dissociative phenomena as a response to trauma in preference to the more essentialist view that has plagued dominant models of mental health for far too long. I am reminded of a disagreement with a client* in which she insisted that her experiences of repeated sexual assault had not affected her in any way and now remain firmly in the past. I found myself reminding her of her difficulties with inhabiting her own body and setting boundaries, disrupting her “defensive” thinking, in a way which I now view as an unconscious attempt to appropriate her into the role of a rape victim. I used a metaphor of trying to walk on a broken leg in an attempt to foster self-compassion. However, she insisted that she was not broken. We remained at an impasse in our work for weeks, when we both realised that she remained trapped between the two rather dangerous narratives of self as damaged and thus destroyed by rape, and of self as unbreakable, bypassing the pain and going on, thus seeing rape as not a big deal at all. Experiences such as these have led me to wonder whether alternate

therapeutic discourses could resolve the split. If so, perhaps they lie beyond dominant western discourses of psychotherapy and mental health, which are marked by a certain unmoving misogyny, homophobia and racism, and in that which is viewed as non-dominant, more embodied and even esoteric (as suggested by Burkitt, 1999, pp. 108-109) Is it possible to understand broken experiences as something else – an alternative narrative that is more than that of simply putting the fragmented pieces together?

Randal et al. (2008, p. 340) argue that since traditional western discourse on consciousness permits only a few states of consciousness to be defined as ordinary or normal, experiences other than these are often labelled as dissociative or psychotic and thus outwith the range of so-called “normal” states of being. This is the case even though research has shown that hearing voices, feeling depersonalised and derealised, as well as having beliefs that are considered bizarre or even deviant within one’s culture, are much more common than the diagnoses which are assumed to indicate their existence (Randal et al., 2008). Likewise, Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili (1992) describe cultures as being on a scale between *monophasic* – those which institutionally encourage and place importance only on waking consciousness – and *polyphasic void* – those which foster exploration of other phases of consciousness which may differ from that which is considered “reality” in monophasic cultures. Most cultures have developed techniques and practices, such as shamanistic and meditative traditions, or substance use, which allow for access to altered consciousness, with many seeing the value of being able to inhabit alternate consciousness as fundamental in recognising the transient, illusory and constructed quality of physical reality (Winkelman, 2011). With this line of thinking it is possible to construct dissociated states of consciousness, such as the experience of disconnect from the body, as allowing for a deconstruction of “reality”, rather than simply

viewing them as a denial of reality. This leads me to wonder whether my own experiences of being absent in my body, and thus my physical and social reality, have helped form my personal disbelief in dominant discourses of physical reality as solid and real even when I feel integrated and whole, besides having piqued my fascination with discourses that view reality as socially constructed and even fluid and malleable.

There is a tendency to typically ignore altered states of consciousness and pathologise, marginalise or persecute those who noticeably seek or inhabit them (Winkelman, 2011). Randal et al. (2008) present a discussion of alternate subjugated discourses, which challenge the authority of dominant western models that use both “dissociation” and “psychosis” as competing pathologising explanations for phenomena that are considered out of the ordinary. For example, they present Grof and Grof's (1990, p. 31) term *spiritual emergency*, with which they describe these experiences as stages of deep psychological transformation with themes of a spiritual nature, often involving “sequences of psychological death and rebirth, experiences that seem to be memories from previous lifetimes, feelings of oneness with the universe, encounters with various mythological beings, and other similar motifs” (Grof & Grof, 1990, p. 31).

Randal et al. (2008) propose that non-western cultures may provide theoretical and practical knowledge of altered states of consciousness, such as trance states and spiritual states, that offer new insights into dissociative and psychotic states – the common terminology in western psychology, which views them symptomatically. They propose considering the possibility of these experiences being dynamic, as some non-western cultures see them, and thus as transformational processes, whereby mastery can be gained for the purpose of spiritual growth. For

instance, they give the example of a shamanic crisis closely resembling a dissociative state, and how this is viewed as a developmental crisis rather than a pathology and is explained within shamanic traditions as “the ancestor’s attempts in shifting a talented but resisting person into the healing profession”, in the knowledge that experiences like these help individuals transform from victims of spirits to masters of spirits. Crises are viewed in various shamanistic cultures as opportunities for mastering meaningful relationships with the spirits, and as processes of healing oneself before one can heal others. This is reminiscent of the monomyth or the *hero’s journey* (Campbell, 1968), specifically the idea of crises being a part of the *Refusal of the call* – due to fear, feelings of inadequacy or obligations.

I must admit I have been refusing the call – particularly the call to authenticity. It is safer to hide behind theory and the therapist’s role. It is easier to label the restlessness of my soul as pathological than to listen to what it has to say. So for now I stay here in limbo, not yet ready to leap.

*"Oh yes, I'm the great pretender
Pretending I'm doing well
My need is such I pretend too much
I'm lonely but no one can tell*

*Oh yes I'm the great pretender
Adrift in a world of my own
I play the game but to my real shame
You've left me to dream all alone"*

Lyrics of The Great Pretender, recorded by Freddie Mercury
(Ram, 1987)

Chapter VIII: The Pretending Self

The taxi driver looks at me through his rear-view mirror. "Where are you from, love?" he asks. "India", I reply. "Oh, I wouldn't have thought that. You aren't bad looking... for an Indian woman I mean", he smirks to himself. "Thanks", I notice myself saying automatically. Then, horrified at myself for seemingly accepting the pittance he has thrown my way, I feel anger and fear surging through my body at the same time. The voice in my head is trying to calm me down: "*You are alone in this country and it's pitch-dark outside. Now is not the time to get into an argument with this man. Just breathe and you will be out of this cab in a few minutes.*" I was disgusted with myself for putting up with that, but I had to choose my battles and this one did not seem worth it at the time. On previous occasions it had felt as if it was worth the fight. I once knocked out a stranger after he groped me in a pub – that was the only time I wore a saree in the UK. I thought it was worth the fight when I had to stand up to the whole department at my last university to prove the sexual harassment I was facing, while feeling completely disbelieved because of being young and foreign. I took all these memories and more to my therapist and asked him, "*Why do I end up in situations like these, with men like that? I am so tired of having to fight people just to prove that I am worth something.*" I look at the kind but blank eyes in front of me. "*Please don't give me your empathic reflections. Help me understand this please!*" He did not understand; no one did.

I had chosen to go into therapy, after having experienced therapy several times previously with different counsellors, because I realised that I have had a difficulty in romantic relationships, which was at that point getting painful. I was convinced that there was something about me that was fundamentally unlovable. I could not convince my mind that I was indeed deserving of a relationship, even

though I craved the intimacy of one. Caught between numerous social structures in which being coupled with another is assigned a lot of value, I felt that I was a bit of an outcast. Furthermore, I was increasingly finding the erotic hard to handle with my clients. My body would freeze and resist these moments, while my own feelings of erotic countertransference were often fraught with guilt and resistance. I found that these experiences re-enacted a painful rejection theme that seemed to run through my life, in which I found myself repeatedly attracted to men I could not have. Through therapy, I began to understand how, even though I can give people the impression that I am open and receptive, few people actually see who I really am. This came into focus for me when my therapist once said, "You tell me a lot about what you think, but I do not know much about who you really are". Over the weeks after I realised this, I began trying to allow myself to be who I actually am around others. I began taking off the disguise, but my therapist failed to notice how scary and precious the whole process was for me. I started telling him about the most hidden parts of me. Yet, it did not seem to make a dent in him. My worst fears were coming true; I was stripping myself naked and nobody even cared.

I could not get the theories out of my head as I analysed myself constantly throughout the process. I wished he would actually do the interpretation and make the links instead. I really wanted him to take some responsibility even if just to offer a frame within which I could let myself just be. This, coupled with dual relationships that began to develop outside the counselling room in various academic circles, made the weight of this relationship unbearable. So finally, after six months, I told him why I felt this was not working for me, but even my leaving seemed to have little impact on him. It seemed to me as if it really did not matter to him whether I stayed or left. So I left, much as Peter left me. Suddenly and without warning, he was gone. As Winnicott (1965, p.186) once put it, "it is a joy to remain hidden, but disaster not to be found".

I walked out of my therapist's office bruised and embarrassed, but even more determined to work this out for myself. I felt like a hypocrite, as a therapist who walked out on therapy and never wanted to return. Through my experiences of being a therapist and being on a psychotherapy doctorate programme, I had effectively strengthened and hardened up my conditions of worth around my own self-sufficiency. I began to see my processing as Winnicott would: as a militant fantasy of self-sufficiency (Phillips, 1994), and as Fairbairn would: as being "schizoid" (Guntrip, 1952) and I thought it was my duty to challenge it. My mind used these concepts against me, pathologising my independence.

Looking back on my relationship with my counsellor from some distance, I notice how I felt abandoned by him, in a manner that was particular – as though I was not even worth the attention needed to reject me. It highlighted my need to be seen and heard. According to Winnicott, if the infant is not seen and reflected back in the moment of being spontaneous (that is the true self), it feels to the infant as if she does not exist (Phillips, 1994). Further, a child's desire is an expression of her natural aliveness and has an innocent exuberance to it until the sexual guilt of the adults around her is projected onto it (Lowen, 1980). Re-experiencing a shadow of this guilt and rejection with my therapist – although I wish he could have attuned to me sufficiently to recognise it – triggered within me a painful though cathartic outpouring of emotion. This time around, I had the power to end it and the fact that I survived means that I am now a little less afraid that a rejection will annihilate me.

The suspended focus of the meditation practice I threw myself into after leaving therapy has helped me realise that I am worth the inwardly focussed attention. It has helped me to identify my inner critic's voice and separate it from my own silent experiencing – the observer within me, which I view as my true self. While both distancing and attuning to my inner critic, I noticed that I could separate a true identity from the inner critic who could otherwise consume my sense of

wholeness. I have found within me a knowledge of true power and expansiveness, which transcends ideas of worth. This to me is reminiscent of the Vedantic Self within Hindu philosophy as revealing the non-dual truth of all existence, as well as understandings of consciousness in Buddhist philosophy, which emphasises the experience of the true self as pure existence, consciousness and limitlessness (Waldron, 2008; Whitfield, 2009). Both the Jungian and Vedantic notions of self (Whitfield, 2009), much like those in other eastern philosophies, is similar in description to Winnicott's true self, though Winnicott expresses a much narrower view of the true self as being a separated identified entity (Winnicott, 1965). Winnicott bases psychological wellbeing and individuation on separating from others and on viewing reality as external and objective, while Jungian and eastern ideas view individuation as finding one's real self, which is not an identity or ego construct but a state of consciousness that is in essence connected to everything else in existence.

Phillips (1994) notes that that composure, in the form of self-reliance, is a kind of self-holding that maintains an open prospect of discovering an atmosphere in which the composure itself can be surrendered. So I have given myself time to reflect, write and read simply for myself while focusing on giving myself space to develop my meditation practice and spiritual awareness. Incidentally, I no longer want to know *Why?* My own promise to take better care of myself keeps me feeling safer. Every day I renew the promise and feel a little safer.

“Because the analyst’s identification with the patient is based on real components of his (the analyst’s) own personality, and because he and the patient are thereby locked in mutual woundedness, it follows that the work the analyst does on himself can have a direct effect on the patient’s complexes... This blurring of the patient/analyst boundary could be called a regressive one, a kind of regression in service of the healing. To the therapist it feels like a regression on his own behalf, though he also knows it is ‘for’ the patient and treatment. As the analyst slowly integrates the client’s inner realities, which are grounded now in the analyst’s own, the client slowly synthesises too. The image they share of a ‘patient’, and that both participate in psychologically, is gradually repaired.” (Sedgwick, 2016, p. 112)

Chapter IX: The Shameful Self

Session 21

Peter was soaking wet from the rain when he walked in. I did not have anything to help him dry up. So, I switched on the heater as he mopped himself off with all the tissues in the box. He pulled off his wet socks and dug his large naked feet into the cheap carpet.

“I don’t think I can do this anymore”, he said, his voice booming louder with every word. “I can’t stand it. It is all the screaming and the shouting. I want to get out of this marriage now. But I can’t. I don’t know how. She scares me now. I’m completely trapped. I don’t even see the point of us talking. We have been talking for what now? Almost six months? And don’t get me wrong; it has been good to get stuff off my chest and it’s good talking to someone who understands. But that is all I am doing – just talking. I’m a failure as a husband and a man. He was right – my stepdad. He knew I would never amount to anything. And the goddamn fucking asshole was right! Damn it ...”

His face is in his hands. The veins in his forearms are threatening to burst through his skin. I cannot help but think that it is taking everything in his power for him not to claw his own eyes out. He pulls at his hair instead. There was something quite frightening about watching this big strong man crumple like that all of a sudden. My heart broke for him, but yet a rather significant part of me could not help but feel disappointed in him – even I dare say, in his gender as a whole – as all his bravado and dominance ultimately amounted to nothing. I tried to push away that cynicism in my mind. Where was my anger coming from? I tried to focus on the

shaking little boy in front of me.

He had lifted his head and was looking at me.

"I am so sorry, Natasha", he said as though he had read my mind.

"Why are you apologising, Peter?" I responded automatically as per the doting maternal protocol I had adopted with him over the year, feigning that I did not know the reason.

He was silent and, avoiding my eye, he began to stare at the floor.

He was breathing heavily, trying to suppress his anger, and then he said softly, "Ummm... I am sorry about the colourful language there and for yelling at you like that. It isn't your fault. You are trying to help, I know. This just seems so pointless the both of us just talking. Nothing has changed. Actually, things have gotten worse. At least before I just did not think or feel much. Now I am starting to want things. I want a better life and it feels like hell knowing that I am stuck here. I can't just go kill myself like before. Now I actually have to do something and I can't. I just... I don't know how. What do I do? Sometimes I want to hit her – smash her face in. Nothing I do is good enough for her. It is constant, everyday – 'Pete, why do you act like this? Why can't you behave yourself in public? Why can't you just listen to me? Why don't you talk to me? I wish I had never met you; you have destroyed my life!' [He mocks her voice, but it is the furthest thing from funny.] And then when I try to talk to her, she just starts yelling, going on about how I do not care for her. I don't know how to care for her! I don't know what she needs! Whatever I do is wrong. She just locks herself in the bathroom and cries for hours like I am some sort

of monster. I can't make her stop crying, there is no point in even trying... I spend all day at work thinking about her crying on the bathroom floor, and I have just left her there like some sort of abusive husband. I don't know what else to do. When I try to touch her she pushes me off. I have turned into him for god's sake! That disgusting man, who leaves his wife beaten up and crying. I would never physically hurt her – I never have and I never will. But it's all the same in the end isn't it. No matter how much I try I cannot be the man she wants me to be. “

He comes to a dead halt, surprised to hear himself.

“You cannot be the man she wants you to be”, I repeat slowly, trying to let it sink in for myself as much as for him.

“ No, I can't.”

He breathes out, his body eases up and he leans back, tipping his head over the back of the armchair, his hands over his face again, this time in resignation.

I can breathe again. Deep inside I know the worst is over.

We are silent. Should I say something? Should I let him know I am here? No, just keep quiet.

He doesn't move.

So I count my breath and begin to pray. Show me what I need to do. Speak through me.

10 breaths, 20 breaths, 25...26...27...

And he lifts his head. He looks different, calm, still a bit red in the face but okay.

“That's it isn't it? It's that simple but I have taken so long to accept it. I just cannot be who she wants me to be.”

“ You have been trying to be someone you are not, whom you cannot be.”

“Yeah, but see, the problem is she doesn't know who I am. Nobody does. I

can sometimes get a sort of feel of it but to tell you the truth even I do not know who I am. I keep trying to do these things to prove that I am worth something. I am just trying to be the best at something so that I can be me. Does that make any sense to you?"

"You are trying to master these things so you can create an identity for yourself?"

"Correct, that is it – an identity! An identity so that I'm not just this – So if I am a good husband then that can be me. Is this sounding crazy?"

"No, I think I'm getting this, go on."

"So I'll... Let me think... yeah, so the other night. We were in bed and she seemed to really want to talk. I told her about my day. It was nice in a way. Initially I thought perhaps we were going to have sex again, finally. But that wasn't where it was headed, and that was okay for me because she was smiling and she seemed happy just talking to me. Then it all went really wrong. She said she wished I were like this more often. She wants me to open up to her more. I did not know what she meant, I tried to say something back but I couldn't breathe. So she sort of gets on top of me as she talks – not all of her – she just had her elbows on my chest, arms crossed and her face directly on top of mine. I couldn't move; I suppose I could have pushed her off if I tried, but in the moment it felt like she had me pinned down, with her whole weight on my chest. And she kept talking to me; maybe she was trying to get closer but I was just suffocating. I didn't want to hurt her feelings so I just lay there. She was screaming after a while, maybe because I wasn't responding. I just remember her saying "Why don't you let me in? Why are you so closed off?" But I couldn't focus my eyes and my head was spinning and I just shut down again. Sort of like what happened here the other week, but much worse. I don't remember if I said anything. I think she forgot she had me pinned down like that. She was getting

louder and louder. I don't know how something so nice could have turned into that. I was begging her to stop at one point. I don't remember, I just have flashes of what happened, it's all a bit fuzzy. "Stop what!" she was screaming. "I am just trying to talk to you!" I don't know how long it went on. I just sort of slipped out. I couldn't believe it was happening again. I could have easily lifted her off me – she is quite a small woman – but I kind of forgot I could. It was like I was six years old again."

“Weren’t you six years old when your dad ...”

“Yes, that was it exactly. My God! I forgot you know that.”

“Does Gina know that?”

“No. I don’t know where to start, Natasha. How do I? I mean everything is so messed up already. She cried herself to sleep again and I couldn’t even move after that. When I think about it, how was she supposed to know I would react like that? She is a bit full on though. I mean she could give a guy some space to breathe. She isn’t a mean person. She is actually sensitive and kind. I suppose she wouldn’t have done it if she knew or she would have stopped if I told her she was freaking me out. But, I couldn’t even think straight then.”

I couldn’t be wholly convinced of that; I would have rather painted her out to be the villain in the piece rather than even entertain the notion that the man in front of me could be capable of doing much damage. But then again, I wondered if he could be as that day; I could not get that niggling feeling of unexplained anger out of my stomach. I knew there was something not quite right as soon as he walked in sopping wet that evening. Was it anger really – no, it burnt too much for anger?

“Ummm.... Natasha”, he broke my train of thought “There is something else. How do I say this? There is something I need to tell you. I don’t know how to do it.” He was squirming in his seat.

“What is it, Peter?”

“It is one of the hardest things I have ever had to say.”

He opened and closed his mouth, almost ready to blurt it out and then rethinking.

“Take your time. There is no hurry and no pressure, okay? I can see this is difficult”, I tried to reassure him.

“I just need to tell you. I mean I have to tell someone. I am not proud of this. Right... See last night, I was out drinking with my pals and Gina doesn’t like me going out

after work. But last night I just did it and I got a bit wasted, I think and I don't know what happened. I have never done anything like this in my life. I slept with this girl I met at the bar."

He was searching my face for a reaction. I was trying not to give him the one he wanted. His eyes filled up as though he expected to be slapped in the face.

The burning had now turned into a searing pain cutting right into my chest. Last night? A part of me was expecting this for the last forty-five minutes. A hundred thoughts were buzzing through my head. *Why last night? Why now? We were so close – so close to him breaking through all the guilt and fear. Now he has gone and destroyed every chance he has. Why does he want to be the bad guy so badly? Is he standing up to her or ... me?*

"I am a piece of shit. Don't you think?" he asks.

"No I don't", I retort a little too quickly

"I find that hard to believe. What do you think then?"

"Well, I don't know what was going on in your mind or what this means for you now. So you could tell me more about that. But to answer your question, in light of all that we have been discussing over the weeks, I was thinking something along the lines of self-sabotage. How does that idea land for you?"

Peter furiously rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand with a vengeance necessitated by the lack of tissues and his determination to prevent me seeing his tears.

"Remember how last week I said I was ready to talk to Gina about us and maybe tell her how she makes me feel with the things she does." His voice breaks. "I even

thought maybe we could either figure something out or break it off and go our separate ways. You know, just accept it if we aren't right for each other. I was feeling quite strong; like we were on equal ground and that I could face her. Now how do I do that? How can I possibly look her in the eye again?"

Session 29

I hold the door open for Peter and he surprisingly walks across the room to my armchair and backs into it. He presses his palms into the arms of the chair, descends as if to sit down, but then stops and swings his bottom back and forth slightly considering it, while looking daringly into my eyes with a mischievous grin on his face. He lands into the chair with an "Ah" of relief, crosses his left ankle over his right knee in a way only a man has the permission to and raises an eyebrow as he searches my face for a reaction.

"I thought I would take a look at the view from this side today."

I stare at him incredulously.

He laughs out loud as though he heard what I just said rudely to him in my own head. Did he?

I walk over to his seat, sit down, and cross my legs: feeling aware of my pencil skirt and how it restricts my movements and paradoxically makes me feel powerful at the same time. Suddenly I realise that I am alone in the presence of this man, who for the first time is commanding a status that I haven't seen him use yet.

"So what is the view like from there?" I ask after a few minutes of silence.

“Strange... Aye, it’s different. I see what you normally see. I like it.” He nods in my direction.

He is sitting up straight for the first time, interlinking his fingers across his belly while his elbows rest comfortably on the arms of my chair. He eyes me as he would a little girl. It makes me feel uneasy, but I decide to go along with it for now. He has come out to play with me now, so I let him play.

Sometimes I have an image of myself arguing and crying before a cruel and unyielding monster that is my own inner critic who refuses to see reason. As I beg to be understood, I notice that this is a futile process – I cannot make sense of that which I am trying to point at and perhaps that is the way it is meant to be. Fragmented, broken and beautiful in its nonsense.

I keep coming back in circles to the terrible idea that five years into this doctorate programme, I still cannot manage to hold on to the writing and develop a clear focus. It evokes old wounds that sting –

“Just like you can’t manage to hold on to a relationship” a cruel voice in my head chimes in.

Perhaps there is some truth to what the voice says. This stuff of relationships and more importantly, this stuff of living from our *true selves*, is impossible. We only keep searching for different ways to point at it. Amongst all the descriptions of therapeutic encounters, I can find myself looking at my messy experiences with clients and wondering how these other therapists and authors seem so clear and so sure that they knew what was happening. Yet every time, with every client, I am repeatedly confounded and brought down to my knees.

So again and again, in trying to articulate the complexities of the realms we inhabit, I lose any vestige of pride that remains in the hollow from which I once showed off an education.

"A jack of all things and a master of none", the cliché rings in my ear in an old schoolteacher's voice.

At one point towards the end of our relationship, Peter said to me, "You do not realise how much you have helped me. You are the first person who actually saw me; I now feel like finally I exist – I am real. I have never felt that before." His eyes filled up with tears as my heart ached because I was restricted in a role that would not allow me to burden him with the knowledge that I was utterly transformed through knowing him.

I look at this man – my animus perhaps – about to merge back into myself. No, I believe he is about to drift off soon. I want to call out, *"Don't go!"*

I cannot do or say anything that dramatic in this setting, considering he is still a "client". So I do manage to use therapist-like words and hopefully communicate how important he is to me and how much I cherish our relationship and the work we have done together – though tears trickle down my face, determined to be unshackled, and I pray he knows even though I cannot speak.

It is getting harder and harder to write about Peter. And as he disappears I begin to think about dissociation again. I have been repeating the word to myself so many times that it has lost all meaning and so have any theories behind it. It is just a string of a few strange sounds now. So what am I studying then? The panic has

begun again – like an old friend I can't really stand the sight of anymore. I am angry with myself for not really knowing what I am writing about. I feel annoyed that I cannot stay connected to the writing. In fact, writing makes me feel disconnected, numb and cold inside. I have checked out of this research. As I speak to others about my research topic I wonder if they can see through the big words to the nothingness behind it. "Dissociation" is an awfully pretentious word, which in itself is dissociation, a splitting off from an experience into an intellectualisation, perhaps because life is so utterly crazy. The word glosses over all of that, selling the silly idea that I can be a disembodied voice of reason instead of a crying mess on the floor.

I am reminded of how I went on a mission to be good when I was young. If nothing else, I would get things right academically. But, I cannot get it right anymore. I cannot fit these ideas into theories or vice versa. At the core of all of this is deep shame. The shame is the unbearable bit I cannot live with, and yet at other times I cannot live without it. Just staying with the shame, rather than flitting off to ideas of what could have caused it or what I can label it as, is hard for me. I have been trying to distract myself with everything possible, stall the project, sabotage myself unconsciously, just to avoid the soul-crushing shame. I don't like this part of me. It adheres to every horrible thing I stand against. It believes every lie about my inadequacy; it convinces me they are not lies at all.

Jung proposed the ability of the psyche to split into various personalities or systems of consciousness sourced in the archetypal depths of the psyche – that is, from within deep structures, patterns and ways of living that serve as a passed-down memory of the history of human culture. Jung's early work placed less emphasis on the impact of external trauma, giving more attention to the endogenous trauma caused by conflictual fantasy (Skea, 2013). He suggested that this dissociative ability of the

psyche fosters the expansion of the personality through greater differentiation of function, allowing particular aspects of the psychic structure to be consciously selected, trained and brought to their maximum potential. This, according to Jung (2014), produces an unbalanced state, which sparks creative change and transformation. In fact, Jung noted that the most creative individuals are not well-rounded, but are frequently unbalanced and inclined towards their genius, while often being immature and even pathological in other areas such as their relationships. Thus, Jung viewed the dissociative capacity as representing a unique standpoint, perhaps one that offered the possibility of epic and heroic transformation – particularly of a realisation of a broader union of all things – should the experiencer move in that direction. Jung formulated the idea that his form of therapy could reconstitute pathology through modes that some creative individuals discovered extemporaneously. These always required some kind of conscious expression of the emergence of healing images and symbols from the unconscious, through dreams, art work, writing etc. Jung focussed on the myth-like visions which were generated by dissociated ego states, noting that the archetypal nature of fantasies, expressions and other experiences when in dissociated states was part of the growth and individuation process itself (Skea, 2013).

The more I try to understand dissociation, the more I realise how mechanistic it appears in its symbolisation of phenomena that are indescribable. I have noticed that therapists are encouraged to help a client find the right words or other expressions to symbolise their thoughts and feelings. It seems to provide people with immense meaning and relief to have their feelings acknowledged. I have noticed that I do this too. I search for words and expressions that will best describe a feeling. Suddenly there is an “aha” moment of finding something that fits or something that I realise will help the other experience a sense of what I am experiencing. A brief

moment where I say “That is it!” and I use it and hope people understand and if I think they do I let it go. I am doing this right now as I write. I cannot help but wonder whether this whole process of trying to name and explain feelings reduces everything spectacular in our world to words. That way I can continue to pretend not to be overwhelmed and in awe of my existence and bring it down to some sense that it is rather ordinary. Perhaps this gives me permission to let go of my feelings, to forget about them, and to allow them to dissipate into the ether of everything that is ungraspable yet crudely named in the English language. Or do I settle with “aha”s and relief at finding a word that gains me acceptance by someone else? The idea that I am understood seems to be enough for me. I wonder if I would take validation from others over masking my need for real connection.

I am completely losing direction now. I feel like I am losing my mind. Well, what else did I expect when I started exploring the most broken parts of myself? I start doubting whether this is actually research. I have been enmeshed in quantitative research for long enough for it to sink its claws into my mind. This is getting excruciating to write. Suddenly I remember a sentence I read about autoethnography early on in this journey.

“Just when you think you can’t stand the pain anymore, well, that is when the real work has begun” (Ellis, 1999, p. 672).

“One day when the children were playing they reported to Yaśodā, ‘Kṛṣṇa has eaten dirt.’ Yaśodā took Kṛṣṇa by the hand and scolded him and said, ‘You naughty boy, why have you eaten dirt?’ ‘I haven’t,’ said Kṛṣṇa. ‘All the boys are lying. If you believe them instead of me, look at my mouth yourself.’ ‘Then open up,’ she said to the god, who had in sport taken the form of a human child; and he opened his mouth.

Then she saw in his mouth the whole universe, with the far corners of the sky, and the wind, and lightning, and the orb of the earth with its mountains and oceans, and the moon and stars, and space itself; and she saw her own village and herself. She became frightened and confused, thinking ‘Is this a dream or an illusion fabricated by God? Or is it a delusion in my own mind? For God’s power of delusion inspires in me such false beliefs as “I exist,” “This is my husband,” “This is my son.”’ When she had come to understand true reality in this way, God spread his magic illusion in the form of maternal love. Instantly Yaśodā lost her memory of what had occurred. She took her son on her lap and was as she had been before, but her heart was flooded with even greater love for God whom she regarded as her son.”

From the Bhagavata Purana (translated by and quoted in O’Flaherty, 2015: 109-110)

Chapter X: The Spiritual Self

Session 40:

"I trust you. I don't know why. I know nothing about you. Maybe it's the way you are, I don't know... you seem trustworthy, I suppose, but I don't know what you are like outside of this room. And it can be frightening to think that I put things out there and it's gone – out of my control – that you take some of it with you out there. For all I know you may just go out there and say to someone 'You have no idea what Peter came up with today!' But for some reason, maybe because I do not know, I don't feel so afraid."

Before I could digest how intimate that was, he shifted subjects and began a sort of political conversation as he considered power, difference and privilege and its impact on his life. He spoke about our relationship, what it was like for us to be of different races and sexes. He began to almost apologetically explain how he felt he did have some privilege that made its way into our relationship. I noticed this too but also I reminded him of what he had just said a few minutes ago, that he is baring his soul to me and he knows nothing about me – and in that respect I held a lot of power in the relationship. The words were coming out of me but I also felt that I was losing track.

"Yes", he said, "it is a power relationship. Everything is, and if I think of it that way, you have a lot of power too". He is smart and profoundly understanding of power. But today, it seemed that he was growing weary of the intellect, and quickly gave up our who-is-more-powerful discussion. It was a relief to me as I was finding it increasingly difficult to concentrate; there was something more important present and I was sure of it.

Instead, he said something unexpected.

“Do you remember what you said about that wall I put up? So, I have been thinking about it and I have come to realise that there isn't really anyone who knows the real me. Nobody knows who I really am. It is all an act, it always has been, because I am so afraid of what they will see if they know the truth.”

He looked straight into my eyes in silence and then began slowly and carefully choosing his words to describe a "hollow" within him, which he had never allowed anyone to know about until this moment. He described this nothingness as the core or essence of who he was, but he feared others would be horrified to see that he was indeed nothing. The authenticity of his words created a palpable depth in the air between us. It was as though I had suddenly but carefully descended into a realm that was constant, surreal and timeless – even blissful despite the focus on "emptiness". I felt as if I had known him for years. I dare say it felt as if I had known him all my life. As he spoke about his precious inner self, I found myself allowing every detail of the experience in – the colours and sounds around me, the temperature, the sensations in my body, the movements of his, and the exact grey of his gaze.

For the first time, he was speaking with me not at me.

“Although I don't like myself much, I can, at times let, let myself into that big empty space sometimes, just to have a look around – but, no one else – never. I think most people would freak out. It is just for me now to be with myself. I wonder if I will ever know what that deep trust and intimacy would even feel like; you know, the kind I would need to let someone in there? Would I even recognise it or let it happen?”

But then again, here I was standing, smack in the middle and he had not

kicked me out yet. He tried not to acknowledge my presence there, averting his gaze from me. Perhaps if he did not look at me, I wouldn't be there. Instead he used all the words he could – slowly, carefully, deliberately until he grew exhausted from speaking and eased into his chair, seemingly resigned to the fact that he could not verbally explain the expansiveness and depth of what he was trying to convey. Though he really did not need to; I was in that emptiness – no, I was the emptiness as well – the vast universe that was him, shut out to the rest of the world.

“You know what I'm talking about, don't you? I mean I am making sense here, right?”

“I think I get it. Maybe I could check out with you that I have got it right...”

“No, don't. I didn't even need to ask, I am absolutely sure you do.”

We were connected; we were in essence the same. We might as well have been dancing, or making love.

That being said, it was also more than that. I notice right now that I am using the word “I” as I try to articulate what this felt like in words – but there was no “I”. “I” was gone and to be honest I didn't even miss her. There was just something – and nothing. We were speaking, but I couldn't tell you who said what because I couldn't tell that we were two people at all. We could have been speaking for hours, and then suddenly with that thought, “I” emerged again, rushed back into her role and looked at the clock, as therapists do. She realised that it had only been 20 minutes and broke the spell. Time started again; we were separate people again. I had made sure of it, as my own wall came crashing down between us.

I walk home in the cold rain, my fingers locked solid on the chilly steel of the

umbrella handle, wondering what in the world happened in this session. There was a huge shift and I could not quite tell what it was. The encounter was hugely intimate, erotic, and even peaceful – as though we had reached a peak in our relationship, a union. I find it hard to articulate the sexual and spiritual intensity of the experience. I think mostly of the experience of timelessness. Somehow we managed to create spaciousness in our hour. My mind wanders to how Newtonian time, the lens through which I have been taught to see my life, imagines time as a dimension of consecutive events that exist within a somewhat empty containing arrangement of the universe. This is only one perspective in line with Abrahamic religious philosophies that view time as linear, with a definite beginning and ending (Markosian, 2002). Other schools of thought, such as those of Native American tribes, the Ancient Babylonians and Ancient Greeks, and the Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Chinese, Japanese and other philosophies, regarded time as cyclical (Bastian & Mitchell, 2004, p. 34; Lewis, 2005, pp. 126-128). In therapy, the cyclical nature of time at least in emotional experience is evident when I consider flashbacks in clients with post-traumatic stress or how anniversaries (particularly of deaths) can bring clients back to past events as though they were present and alive. Cyclical time is not viewed as a scarce commodity, unlike linear time, which often accompanies the notion of running out of time. Hindu philosophy, for instance, views the creation and destruction of the universe as a continuous cyclical process (Coward, 1999, p. 22); while distinguishing between *kala* (chronological time) and *ritu* (opportunistic time) creating a complex and nuanced mosaic of the phenomenon of time (Sharma, 1974, pp. 27-33). *Ritu* is understood to play a significant role in our lives when we come across the right time for something, such as the right moment to challenge a client or allow for silence – it is a palpable moment, pregnant with potential which can be experienced as knowing that it is the perfect time to act or not. Later on, the Ancient Greeks similarly differentiated between quantitative time, *chronos*, and qualitative

time, *kairos* (Smith, 1969). Lewis (2005, pp.135-136) explains that therapy can help in the transpersonal task of identifying with a context larger than the self, not just through the content, but also through the process of psychotherapy – which promotes the transpersonal in its relationship to time. Lewis (2005, p.135) borrows Epstein's (1996, pp. 29-31) construction of the therapist's role as providing an evenly suspended attention which allows for a meditative attentiveness in the client. Consequently, irrespective of the content of the therapy, which involves a dialogue about the past, the process of therapy permits a unique attention to now, which has the potential to create a timeless transpersonal experience for both client and therapist. Contained by such an experience, union with others is possible. Ironically, although the client's trauma positions him in time, it is the fundamental acceptance of being unable to turn back time and have a different past that allows for an experience of timelessness in the now. The acceptance of the passage of time allows transcendence of time as one remains present in the now (Lewis, 2005, p. 133-135). Being reminded that we cyclically return to the pure consciousness of timelessness in one way or another provides a larger and stronger containment for me and permits me to surrender to life and existence as it is.

The experiences of timelessness, losing ego identification and transcending the mind which are thought to be characteristics of enlightenment in many Eastern cultures (Epstein, 1988, pp. 61-62), seem to be stigmatised in Western thought, and are often pathologised in the construction of psychological disorder. Infant functioning is mostly unconscious. Freud describes the unconscious id as knowing no values, no good and evil, no morality and surprisingly, no time (Freud, 1940). Thus, the unconscious is essentially unconditional. Freud notes his own fascination and lack of progress in understanding how the unconscious (particularly that which is repressed into the unconscious) remains unchanged by the passing of time, and concludes that the unconscious knows no time

(Freud, 1940) – while from a Jungian perspective, the main purpose of life is to reveal the unconscious to consciousness. Jung borrows from Eastern philosophies to express this process in a spiritual terminology that refers to our place in the universe. For Jung, God is the unconscious, who gradually manifests in consciousness when allowed through (Whitfield, 2009, p. 83). Jung proposed that the assimilation of synchronistic phenomena into consciousness was an important feature of individuation (Keutzer, 1984). The Jungian concept of synchronicity is a modern descendant of the archetypal belief in the essential unity of all that is (Keutzer, 1984), going beyond mechanical cause and effect of separate entities, and alluding to what Jung called “a profound harmony between all forms of existence” (Jung, 1951, p. 216). Jung stressed that when the archetypal level of the collective unconscious is tapped into, there is emotional intensity and a propensity for symbolic representation (Keutzer, 1984). I noticed this in Peter’s further amplifications of his “hollow” and other symbolisations, as well as the meaning he ascribed to our meeting as synchronistic and purposeful even though short-lived. We spoke about our moment of connection again and it appeared that he had begun to shift his awareness of his identity from his perceptions of how others viewed him to a more thoughtless, wordless expansive experience of himself as an experiencing being, easing into himself after years of being at war with his own experiencing. I found myself more receptive to the ocean of life that existed in every moment with him. We had all the time in the world.

These feelings of true power that Peter described reminded me of the Vedantic Self within Hindu philosophy as revealing the non-dual truth of all existence, which emphasises the experience of the true self as pure existence, consciousness and limitlessness (Whitfield, 2009). Both the Jungian and Vedantic notions of self, much like those in other eastern philosophies, is similar in description to Winnicott’s true self, though Winnicott expresses a much narrower view of the

true self as being a separated, identified entity (Winnicott, 1965). Winnicott bases psychological wellbeing and individuation on separating from others and viewing reality as external and objective, while Jungian and eastern ideas view individuation as finding one's real self, which is not an identity or ego construct but a state of consciousness that is in essence connected to everything else in existence.

When considering external or internal focus, Jung significantly increased the scale of meaning and elucidations that could be attributed to physical happenings and to the inner experiences of his patients. He especially valued the states of consciousness that revealed unique emotional features, which resembled the existential notion of *Augenblick* – the moment when one unexpectedly and rapidly comprehends the gist of a key symbolic experience, in a way that is not intellectual alone but is an instant of heightened awareness (often referred to as the “aha” moment), resulting in an alteration of gestalt or a shift to a new positioning of the person towards the world or the future (Keutzer, 1984). Jung developed this idea by employing the principle of synchronicity to convey meaning to several experiences which were unfathomable within a conventional causal or Newtonian model, and he held that the incorporation of synchronistic phenomena into consciousness was a central characteristic of individuation (Keutzer, 1984). Jungian individuation is thus focussed on the incorporation of the “external world” into the self in meaningful ways rather than on the differentiation of external objects as outside the self. Hence, the Jungian conception of synchronicity can be understood as a contemporary descendant of the archetypal belief in the primary unity of all things, which rises above and goes beyond mechanical cause and effect (Keutzer, 1984). The notion of synchronicity powerfully implies that our existences are intrinsically meaningful and that we are consequently responsible for realising and inhabiting that meaning, which implies psychological wellbeing, enhanced with a growing cognizance of meaningful co-incidence. Keutzer (1984) formulates the therapeutic efficacy of exploring the

meaning of synchronicity as relevant only insofar as it is personally meaningful to the client and introduces to the client's perception something new that allows for a different perspective which, in turn, enhances the progression in therapy. Keutzer (1984), thus, understands synchronicity as a kind of spiritual compass, that can prompt us to know whether we are on the "right path" on the lengthy and often painful journey of individuation.

The simple yet powerful story which I introduced in the quote leading to this chapter, of how Yasoda was flooded with incredible love but no memories of what she actually saw in her son's mouth or how she got to where she was, is offered and overused in India to the point of cliché. Yet nothing quite calls up the experience of that shift in consciousness better. Yasoda experienced a spontaneous shift when she least expected it, from a separate, dissociated self to what is called "pure consciousness" (Mohanty, 1979, p. 10) in Indian thought. When considering the use of self and states of consciousness, the big questions like "What is consciousness?" and "What is the self?" come up as they have for the many millennia of human philosophical thinking. I do not attempt to grapple with these, as they are too complex to remain within the scope of this thesis. However, I take the stance that when we speak of consciousness or the self, we are always speaking in metaphor as these seem unattainable to language and description.

It is my experience that within the therapeutic relationship, discernible shifts in consciousness are palpable and crucial to the therapeutic quality of the relationship. I cannot know for sure whether the shifts are experienced only within myself or within the client – or if in fact drawing this clear-cut distinction at all times is of value to the work. So I take the stance that, given a certain depth of empathic attunement, the shifts are co-created or may happen between the two in relationship. I was inspired to consider this as I met my clients at certain moments of what could be understood in person-centred terms as relational depth (Mearns & Cooper, 2005).

Given my cultural and philosophical backgrounds (and arguably the varying degrees of my personal capacity to psychically separate from another), I experienced this depth of relationship as less a meeting between two separate beings and more a tapping into something a lot more expansive than the both of us.

Freud (1914) proposed that each infant starts out in the state of primary narcissism. Primary narcissism, to Freud, is characteristic of the earliest time of life when the infant cannot differentiate between her own ego and the external object; when they are all perceived as one's ego. Thus, in the state of primary narcissism, all emotional investment takes the form of ego-libido, directed at oneself. As the child develops so that she can perceive the object as outside of herself, the object-libido can be directed outside at the external object. Freud viewed this as accurate perception and the correct direction of the libido. Therefore, the investment of the ego-libido precedes object-libido. Additionally, it has been suggested that in primary narcissism, the infant cannot sense the boundary between ego and ego ideal, in contrast to later on in life, when there is a differentiation of experience between ego and ego ideal (Murray, 1964). In the state of merging between the ego and ego-ideal, ego-ideal satisfies the narcissistic desire for perfection in the ego, that is, the illusion that the nurturing ego-ideal co-exists with the ego. This is the belief that "I am the source of the nourishment I need". Primary narcissism is overcome through the continuing acknowledgement and acceptance that the need-satisfying object in fact exists independently of the needy self. Thus maturity, from Freud's perspective, requires recognition of the reality of the separation between the loved-object and the self.

Indeed most psychotherapeutic traditions value the development of the ego self and attribute psychological immaturity or disorder to an incomplete or inadequate development of self. On the other hand, conceptualisations of self in many eastern philosophies, particularly Indian philosophical traditions, with a long

history of focus on the study of the self and human experience, point to over-identification with the self as the cause of suffering and distress. These could be viewed as opposing paths. The emphasis on the end-result in the two traditions is different, with most psychodynamic and other psychotherapeutic theories aiming for ego functioning as the ideal, while eastern thought aims to achieve enlightenment and transcendence. It does this through the language used, featuring concepts such as *Moksha*, *Nirvana*, and *Turiya*, that bring up in myself images of freedom from the psyche, an understanding of our “true nature”, and clarity of perception.

It is therefore possible from this perspective to construct primary narcissism not necessarily as a developmental hurdle that must be overcome, as Freud did, but perhaps as a glimpse into an experience that could spotlight our “true nature”, should we assume that such a nature exists. Furthermore, it has been argued that this lack of separation from the other, though typical of psychic immaturity, is also the fundamental basis of our capability to have a sense of what others feel (Bondi, 2014, p. 50) and therefore could form the basis of our ability to empathise. However, it could also represent confusion between that which is our own and that which is the other's, since, within a psychotherapeutic framework, empathy necessitates the ability, at least momentarily, to untangle and correctly individualise one's own psychological state from that of the client (Bondi, 2014, pp. 50-53).

Bion writes about the losing of boundaries between individuals, in relation to which he proposes the need for therapeutic containment of the merging of selves that results.

“There is a field of emotional force in which the individuals seem to lose their boundaries as individuals and become ‘areas’ around and through which emotions play at will... That state of mind is easier to understand if it is regarded as the state of mind of a group rather than of an individual but transcending the

boundaries we usually regard as proper to groups or individuals” (Bion, 1984, p. 146).

Cartwright (2013, pp. 32-33) understands Bion's use of the term containment, as involving both “presence” and “absence” of the analyst's mind. He uses the words presence and absence of mind to indicate the tension between engaging with states of maternal reverie (Bion, 1962, p. 308), while also being able to offer oneself as an object that could be closer to the demands of external reality. This call for the therapist to use both presence and absence of mind is challenging. The presence of mind in terms of thinking is allowed and encouraged in most mainstream psychotherapeutic formulations.

Though it is hard for me to tell what he means exactly by absence of mind. Is it absence of thinking, perhaps a focus on being instead? I wonder if the absence or presence of mind is in fact that which allows a movement either into maternal reverie or towards an external focus on independent objects. Therefore, I understand this to mean that the presence or absence of mind itself allows for the experience of an outer object use or an inner reverie correspondingly.

It has been proposed that both psychotherapy and meditation serve to help heal the wounds of early infancy by creating a space that allows for the essential psychic task of knowing the experience of being which may have been denied to us in childhood (Epstein, 2008, pp. 78-80). Thus, allowing for that absence of mind, internal focus and that reverie sensation. The transcendental quality of experiencing oneness with another could perhaps be constructed as an opposing and complementary state to dissociation. Vedantic traditions propose that we can experience this state of oneness, which they term *turiya*, accidentally or through spiritual practice. The *turiya* is the expansive state of experiencing the blissful and all encompassing *Brahman* (Paranjpe & Rao, 2008) – the supreme cosmic spirit of all

that is. It is understood that the *Brahman* is revealed as the self, so a person who experiences *turiya* experiences herself as all that is (Parthasarathy, 1984). The self expands and awareness broadens and *pure consciousness* is obtained. This is not a swelling of the ego, but the experience of transcending the ego (Whitfield, 2009). In opposition to this, Buddhist traditions propose the awareness of *Anatta* or non-self (Epstein, 2008, pp. 45-49), whereby the awareness of oneness and *pure consciousness* comes along with the knowledge that the self does not exist. Transcending the ego in the Buddhist perspective is deconstructing and losing any sense of self (Epstein, 1988, pp. 65-67)

While counselling as practised in the UK, where I was trained, is generally secularised, it finds its origins in religious, pastoral and spiritual care, particularly contextualised within the dominant Western Christian ideologies that coloured the landscape of the lands where these therapies developed (McLeod, 2013; West, 2000). Yet, the secularisation of counselling and psychotherapy may have resulted in a lack of attention paid to the spiritual needs of clients (Thorne, 1991; West, 2000). It is possible to view psychotherapy as an essentially spiritual process (West, 2000) and perhaps there is some value in seeing it as such, for just as psychotherapy does not have a monopoly over that which is therapeutic, religion does not necessarily dictate that which is spiritual. However, in following Freud's lead on the matter, dominant narratives in psychotherapy have attempted to divorce it from spirituality. I think this is understandable, as I believe it became important to move away from the dogmatic control and abuse of many religious traditions in order to preserve the dignity of clients and therapists, especially those who came with histories of oppression. Also, there are fundamentalist views in religion that may not allow psychotherapy to openly claim space in spiritual discourses. Furthermore, I find that secularism becomes important within the profession, particularly given our capacity to use

religious tenets as defences to bypass the inner work that needs to be done in the therapeutic process. For instance, early on in my practice in India I would often feel completely stumped by what I understood, at the time, as a client's defensive use of a limited understanding of the concept of *karma* to condone and excuse abuse. Much to my irritation, I often heard statements like "This is my karma. I shouldn't complain or try and change it but find ways to bear it". I realised through time and several mistakes that, due to my lack of understanding of the various interpretations of *karma*, either challenging or colluding with a client's position on this was unhelpful. Instead I needed to engage with the idea myself and when I did I realised how profoundly I was altered internally through a new understanding of *karma* for myself. I educated myself by reading and reflecting on what *karma* means to me, as well as by listening closely to my clients' understandings of how they perceived their *karma* affecting therapy and their therapy affecting their *karma*. I am now able to have more genuine and respectful conversations with clients about it while also making sure that we do the therapeutic work and not bypass the core emotions. In fact I now view therapeutic work as one way in which we process experiences, thus attending to and responding to *karma* and creating new *karma*. Therapeutic work can be one way of doing karmic work, which then alters the trajectory of our lives, as therapy is a process that calls us to be conscious of the self and all that it carries.

The early contrast between Freud's and Jung's approaches can be understood in terms of Freud's insistence (a position that wavered only slightly over time) that religious thinking and spirituality were infantile attempts to create a father figure that could be appealed to in prayer and had no place in the realm of mature intellect (Hewitt, 2014), and Jung's position that the religious function of the human psyche is one that cannot be overlooked and could be a healthy aspect of our being. Jung (2010) valued the spiritual needs of the human psyche to survive and individuate and

understood all emotional issues and problems to eventually uncover the suffering of a soul which has not discovered meaning. In fact, the importance of meaning making is one that few psychotherapeutic approaches would argue against; it remains central to constructivist approaches to psychotherapy (Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000), Frankl's (1985) Logotherapy, as well as humanistic/person-centred thinking (Rogers, 1959) and narrative based therapies (Nelson & Lindemann, 2001).

Stories of Freud's interactions with others paint a different story of his own meaning-making process. For example, when it was proposed to him that the absence of spiritual communication in therapy could be the cause of the problem of paralysis of analysis, Freud responded by saying that "spirit is everything" and that "Mankind has always known that it possesses spirit. I had to show that there are also instincts" (as quoted in Epstein, 2008, p. XIII). Epstein argues that Freud could not possibly envisage a time when we would discard the idea of spirit completely. Moreover, Freud had only a limited experience of the religious and spiritual traditions of the east (Brierley, 1958, pp. 422-424), and his understandings of Hinduism and eastern mysticism came from European sources who probably offered him a colonially appropriated version which would have been characteristic of the time.

Moreover, Freud's assertion that the *ocean-feeling* of Eastern mysticism was reminiscent of primary narcissism and a childish attempt to return to a state of united bliss with mother is not completely unfounded, as it has been noticed that some of those drawn to meditation have evident narcissistic tendencies (Epstein, & Lieff, 1981, pp. 138-140). However, it has also been argued that the meditative practice itself plays a profoundly transformational role in resolving narcissistic conflicts (Epstein, 1986, pp. 154-156), as narcissism remains notoriously difficult to work with in psychotherapy on its own. However, Freud viewed religious thinking from the standpoint of the dominant Abrahamic religions of his context and at times failed

to see that there was more to spiritual life than a “God as Father” analogy. Even though he collected archaeological artefacts to reflect the archaeological metaphors he used in describing the unconscious, he was wary of delving into the mysticism of these objects, despite acknowledging them as representative of the mysterious forces that emerge from the depths of our unconscious (Epstein, 2008, pp. xv, 5, 18, 69-70). Furthermore, as much as the need for a spiritual life can be pathologised, from a Freudian standpoint, as an infantile need to create an omnipresent good parent with whom we are united, the need to ardently prove a world view where spirituality is false can be understood as the opposite – an unconscious desire to “kill” off the parent (Ruiz, 2017). Both could potentially stem from oedipal conflicts. In fact, different cultures may have different prescribed ways of dealing with oedipal trauma. While western mythology (such as the stories of Oedipus and Electra) supports the idea of “killing off” the parent symbolically to achieve independence and autonomy to do as one pleases, mythology in India (such as that of Lord Ganesh) proposes the opposite – that the child is “killed off” for the parent, thus preserving the god-like parent and being deemed blessed with wisdom for allowing the self to be “killed off” (Kakkar, 1978). This can be observed in the broadly generalised cultural difference of inclusion and compliance with the family as a marker of adulthood in India, while separation and independence becomes the sign of adulthood in most of Western Europe. I can often find myself trying and failing to achieve both, dwelling in a sort of hybrid realm between the two perspectives. Neither approach is a complete resolution to the oedipal conflict: in “killing off” the parent one could be plagued by unconscious guilt; conversely, allowing the self to be “killed off” may become manifest in unconscious rage. The difference in emphasis placed on a spiritual life between the East and the West could also be traced to this difference in how the parent-child conflict is resolved and perhaps it makes sense that the push to annihilate and preserve religion also remains polarised between East and West.

For all these reasons, and because the practice of relational therapies acknowledges the deep interconnectedness in relationships, I find it hard to view the practice as separate from spirituality. When I access the spiritual self I feel at one. It feels like the meeting ground of all the other parts of self, where they can all remain as they are. Comstock (1991) presents a radical concept of an “inner self helper” which operates as an organising and guiding force with an integrative potential. Comstock sees this as different from the split off or dissociated parts of the self, in that it often forms a separate entity that has therapeutic value in the resolution of the dissociated components of the ego. Individual clients often describe the presence of this entity in spiritual language as Ancestors, God, Atman, Angels, etc. It is in this experience of the God in me, where I feel I can meet another from a state of deep authenticity, that I find unity and a whole self.

Chapter XI: The Rejected Self

A quick flash of a memory: I am crouching under the back seat of the car. I remember hearing “Get under the seat, girls, quickly!” It was easy to fit under there when five years old. A dark night; I had eaten too much ice cream at the wedding we were returning from. The exaggerated movements of the car wheels so close against my body, combined with the smell of rubber and the damp foot mat, were making me queasy. I heard the word “bomb”. I didn’t know what that meant. Then I heard a noise that sounded like the firecrackers I heard at Diwali. Yet, it was the wrong time of year and I had watched enough television to know what they were – gunshots. It felt to me like an exciting game. My adult self somehow manages to jump into the speeding car, as is possible in distorted memories, and she notices that it really was a terrifying night. She notices that not everyone could afford to hide under the seat if the car had to keep moving. The memory fades away and there is nothing else. I know we all got back home okay. That is all I remember of the horrific Bombay Riots of 1992. Even now when I feel frightened and alone, ironic as it may seem, that memory makes me feel safe. *Who thinks of a riot when they want to feel safe?* Perhaps I find security in chaos. I think about hiding in the car at that moment and breathe in the scent of knowing that I will be driven back home safe.

About twenty years after this incident, I stand in front of an enclosure at the veterinary hospital in Mumbai with my beloved Labrador waiting for a diagnosis that I knew would rob me of his gentle heart, when I notice a sign on the enclosure. It reads something like “Sheru – Injured in the 2008 terror attack”. I had read of this stray dog in the papers and followed his recovery like so many others in the city, hoping that if he survived perhaps we would too. The wild mad dog rammed himself against the mesh, growling and baring his teeth at us. My own rather large dog, who

was twice the size of the stray, cowered behind me. "It's okay," I soothe my dog, "He's a hero. He took a bullet for us. So he is allowed to be a little crazy."

A year later my dog died, held in the loving embrace of everyone he cared about, except me. I was away in Edinburgh, holding back my tears as I tried to do my job and focus on Peter's words. I always return to my job like an addict who needs her hit of closeness. I should not have been at work that day, but I was terrified of facing the loneliness. I was not being a good therapist.

Peter was back to his old self, repeating the same old stories. I thought a moment of relational depth was supposed to deepen therapy, somehow change things. I was disappointed and irritated at my lack of empathy for him that day. I found it hard to concentrate because my heart hurt too much.

"I don't know why I keep doing this, Natasha. Over and over again. We have the same fights. They are like explosions and I have nowhere to hide. I want it all to end. I want to leave. But then I don't. Why can't she change? Why is she like this?"

Did he say explosions? I can hear the gunshots I heard at five. I wonder what happened to Sheru. I think about how some souls seem to come to soak up all the sins of the world.

"I don't think the counselling is working. I don't think the marriage is working. I don't know why we keep going on like this."

I feel ashamed; I am not good enough for him. I do not know how to respond. I know I am supposed to explore his feelings about perhaps wanting to end. Yet, we have had this conversation so many times and he keeps coming back to therapy even though we have spoken of the possibility of ending. So this time I do not say

anything. He keeps talking and I don't realise when I have drifted off. I cannot hear him anymore. I jolt back into myself and wonder if he noticed I wasn't there. Then suddenly I realise I have a question.

"Wait a minute, help me understand this. You have told me that you keep deciding you want to leave and then you don't. For some reason you do not know why you stay."

That's pretty rich coming from me; I don't know why I am staying either when all I want to do right now is go home. I ignore that thought and keep speaking.

"But yesterday while this argument was happening and you said you were going to leave. Do you remember what happened after that? "

"It's a bit foggy", Peter replies. "There was so much yelling. I told her I wanted to leave. She said she didn't want to be married to me either. And then..." He pauses to exhale. "I think she started crying."

I waited for him to continue, but after a long silence I said, "How did you feel while she was crying?"

"I... I think I... No, wait, you are going to have a go at me for telling you how I think instead of how I feel. So I felt, well... I felt quite sad. I also felt like I had hurt her and I didn't want to do that. So I felt sorry. It hurt in my chest. I suddenly remembered how much I love her."

I catch a look of surprise in his eyes. He looks away and down immediately. A single tear hits the carpet and he rubs it away with his shoe. He looks at the clock and says, "We are almost out of time."

"We still have ten minutes."

He ignores me so I try again, "You said you love her."

"Next time."

"You haven't said that to me before."

"Well spotted, Sherlock."

He stands up and shuffles to the door.

"I'll see you next week," I call after him.

I did not see him the next week, or the week after, or the week after that.

I closed his file.

Did I do something wrong? Did I confront him too much? Did I completely mess all of this up? Is that all he needed to know, that he loved her?

Chapter XII: Conclusion

“The end will come before you know it. You will think there is plenty more to do and that you need a hell of a lot more time. But you will wake up one morning and there it will be – done. The end,” Peter once said to me in what feels like another life.

I am back home in Bombay, and I notice I can hardly access a sense of Peter at all here. I left him in Edinburgh. I expected us to find some coherence. I even dared to dream of closure, but he did not come back to see me, and then I eventually left the country. The end was startling as it often is in therapy, and I have no idea what happened to him.

It feels impossible to conclude because a lot feels undone. It is jarring, unexpected, and even hurtful and yet I am told this is the work and that I cannot take it too personally. So I pretend that I don't.

Strengths and weaknesses of the study

Has this exploration led to clarity? No, not necessarily so; instead it has opened up a lot of unanswered questions. While subverting the dominant narrative of the integrated therapist, my intention is not to criticise myself or other therapists but instead to expand our ways of knowing, which I hope will help us become more self-aware practitioners. Exploring therapist failure and vulnerability has a lot to offer in deconstructing the dominant discourse in psychotherapy. It is for this reason that the narrative flows and ends abruptly. It is meant to be unsatisfying and confusing; for this is often how being a counsellor is for me. Using fiction within writing as a method of inquiry offers a possible resolution to the methodological problem of many qualitative researchers who overlook the fact that much of our experience may

be unconscious and unavailable to our awareness (McLeod, 1996). In using fiction within free writing, I allow myself to project and transfer onto the characters and situations I create. I may not be able to hold the position of analysing or explaining every unconscious projection, for much of it may remain outside my awareness. Instead, I offer the material to the reader to consider. The style I use is not one of telling the reader where to look or what to think. It is my intention to allow the ideas to enter the heart of the reader, so that it may be considered and drawn into thought and dialogue.

Of course, as Derrida claimed, deconstruction is both poison and remedy (Derrida, 2004, p. 128). The process of writing was rather painful for me. Between writing sessions, I often felt crushed, as though I would never be able to write again. The whole construction of this thesis on getting lost (Lather, 2007) seemed impossible and at times devastating to my academic goals and sense of achievement. I realise now towards the end that I cannot describe all the parts of me that come into the session with a client. For instance, my refusal to engage theoretically with the erotic at this time—sourcing from a personal and collective shame around the subject—created blocks in my awareness which I could not come to terms with in writing. The avoidance of using the concept of erotic countertransference as a lens through which to view this work was deliberate, as a personal intention to engage with the erotic feelings as they are without labelling and reducing them. The emotions felt too precious to attribute to a countertransference. Indeed, it is hard for a psychotherapist not to hold a defensive position with regard to erotic countertransference (Mann, 1999). Similarly, I created a temporary suspension of the focus on some external trauma, for reasons of both ethics and personal discomfort, even though I touch on trauma gently and sometimes in a roundabout way. However blasphemous it may feel to state this, neither trauma nor the erotic is central to this inquiry; the self is. I am aware that this may appear like an attempt to deny and bypass the “real stuff”: the

triggers, the reasons behind disconnect and excruciating pain, the inability to differentiate countertransference from “real love”. I will leave it up to the reader to decide whether the “bypass” has any value. My reason for avoiding dealing with these two areas directly was that trying to do so created a complete shutdown in my creativity and I could not write for months when I attempted to explore those emotions. It was too traumatic to expose those aspects, and my body resisted it, so I decided I was unprepared for that kind of self-disclosure to be put out for public scrutiny. Therefore, the question remains whether it is at all possible for split and dissociative experiences to be understood from within, without the tendency to dissociate from the effort.

I also realise that I engage with only a few aspects of difference and diversity, namely gender, race and culture, which I dichotomise to bring the issues to light. I completely overlook difference themes around class, considering the economic privilege enjoyed by both client and counsellor in my narrative. I also create rather fixed hetero-normative positions that are relevant to the interaction between Peter and me, but may unintentionally alienate transgender, queer, gay, lesbian, bisexual and asexual experiences. This decision was made simply to narrow the scope of a project that was intentionally polarised for a dramatization of the fragmenting effect in my inner world.

The method is further limited by its potential impact on others, particularly clients, and this has governed a lot of what can and cannot be said. There is a difficulty in pulling together art and research, even though it can be argued that the two may not be as separate as we think. I have noticed that an appropriation seems to happen – an exploitation of art to meet research needs. It is for this reason that my writing feels halted, even silenced, by the impending assessment of this work, for the most personal parts of me go “from invisibility to public scrutiny” (Muncey, 2010, p. 89).

Contributions to counselling and psychotherapy research

I notice that I speak of much that remains unspoken in the profession. I offer my experience as a therapist who is female and Indian working, constructed as within a setting in the UK with a white British “client”. It is uncommon in psychotherapy literature to come across the experience of inter-cultural and inter-gender therapy from the perspective of the counsellor who assumes the minority identity. Most research on difference and diversity focuses on the “oppressed” experience of the client and assumes the dominant background of the counsellor. I have come across depictions of clients more often than of counsellors as occupying minority experiences. Also, psychotherapy traditionally “analyses” and “pathologises” the client’s experience, not the counsellor’s. Most writing in the field is geared towards helping the client and not the counsellor. This is understandable considering our helping role and what clients rightfully expect from us. However, the resulting assumption that the client is disturbed and the counsellor is not can be both profoundly misguided and also bring shame to both parties for their adherence to or contradiction of this dominant narrative. In this thesis, I present the experience of complicated, unacceptable, seemingly irrational and even unprocessed feelings, such as resentment, cynicism, confusion, and unacknowledged erotic feelings. I do not claim that this is ideal or that this is how counselling “should” be practised, but rather that our vulnerabilities as counsellors are often hidden and go unrecognised. There is limited acceptance of the therapist’s use of a vulnerable self and the troubled inner worlds of therapists in research and practice. For instance, hetero-erotic feelings of transference and countertransference between female therapists and male clients remain largely absent in therapist self-disclosures (Mann, 1999, pp. 13-14), possibly due to the cultural shame around overt expressions of female sexuality.

. Through the process of getting lost, the knowledge produced is immediate and spontaneous and surpasses the craving to appear a competent therapist, which I believe blocks genuine expression. The contributions have grown organically and spontaneously from the writing and were not sought calculatedly. In fact, the original focus of the project was different to what sprouted naturally out of the process. I believe it is of value to have knowledge that comes about in this way, especially as the counselling process unfolds similarly as well. This offers a real counter-argument to the claim that qualitative research does not possess the rigour (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 388) of quantitative studies, as characterised by the “holy trinity” (Kvale, 1996, p. 229) of validity, reliability and generalisability. The real stuff of therapy comes from that which we are completely unaware of initially, and so it must, I argue, with research that is relevant to a practice so deeply rooted in the unconscious. There is a need for more exploration in future research on the experiences of therapists, particularly those with non-dominant voices, to demystify the therapeutic process and allow for greater acceptance of ourselves and our clients. Creative methodologies offer a way of doing this ethically and more authentically, and in greater depth.

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Appendix: Ethics Documentation

The ethics documentation that follows on the next page contains a different title than the one I have used in the final version of this thesis. This is because the process of writing as a form of inquiry led to an organic shift in focus in the later drafts. However the methodology of the project and the ethical considerations remained the same.

University of Edinburgh, School of Health in Social Science



RESEARCH ETHICS APPLICATION (REA)

The forms required when seeking ethical approval in the School of Health and Social Sciences have now been merged into this single electronic document. The sections you are required to complete will depend on the nature of your application. Please start to complete the form from the beginning and proceed as guided. On completion the **entire** document should be submitted electronically to your section's ethics tutor using the email addresses detailed on the final page.

FORM OVERVIEW

FORM	COMPLETION
Project registration form	: Compulsory for all applications
Document checklist	: Compulsory for all applications
Level 1 Self Audit form	: To be completed for all research studies that are not subject to review by an external UK based ethical committee.
Level 2 /3 ethical review form	: To be completed when indicated by responses on the Level 1 form.
Level 4 ethical review form	: applies to research which is potentially problematic in that it may incorporate an inherent physical or emotional risk to researchers or participants, or involve covert surveillance or covert data collection.

PROJECT REGISTRATION FORM

This form is the first stage in applying for University ethical approval and should be completed prior to the commencement of any research project. Applications submitted without appropriate documentation will be returned.

Ethical approval is required for all projects by staff or students conducting research, or similar. Applicants should familiarise themselves with the School's Research Ethics Policy prior to completion.

PR1	Name of Applicant: Natasha Thomas
PR2	Name of Supervisor²: Dr. Jonathan Wyatt
PR3	Project Title: Between dissociation and oneness: Shifts in consciousness in the therapeutic encounter
PR4	Subject Area (section of school): Counselling and Psychotherapy
PR5	If student, type of assessed work that this application relates to: Doctoral thesis
PR6	Planned date of project submission: 30 th November 2016
PR7	Date ethics application submitted: 29 th October 2016
PR8	(Date complete information submitted if different):
PR9	IRAS Approval Number if applicable:

² Not applicable to staff members.

The following to be completed by ethics administrator	
PR10	Date of initial response to applicant:
PR11	Date of final approval:
PR12	Amendments Requested Date:
PR13	Amendments Approved Date:
PR14	Reviewer 1
PR15	Reviewer 2 <small>Level 2/3/4 only</small>
DOCUMENTATION CHECKLIST	

1) ^{DC1} Does your research project require extraction or collection of data abroad? (✓)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	If 'No' Skip to Q2	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	Local Ethical review needed, please confirm (✓) electronic attachment of: Application to ethical review panel in country of data collection (in English) + copy of letter of approval	

2) ^{DC2} For the purposes of this research study, will you access identifiable³ information on any NHS patient? (✓)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	If 'No' Skip to Q3	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	Please confirm (✓) electronic attachment of:	Caldicott Guardian approval for use of NHS data (or confirmation that it is not required)

3) ^{DC3} Does the project require ethical review by an external UK committee e.g. NHS REC or Social Work?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No	If 'No' Skip to Q4	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	Please confirm (✓) electronic attachment of:	NHS REC (IRAS) /other application form + copy of letter of approval
NOTE: You are <u>not</u> required to complete University ethical review forms. Skip to Q6			

4) ^{DC4} Unless you answered 'yes' to 3, you must also obtain ethical approval through the University of Edinburgh process. Please submit a Level 1 form (with 'Methods' summary) and, if indicated, a level 2/3/4 form as well.

SHSS Ethics paperwork	Forms: level		Summary of 'Methods'
	1	2/3/4	
Please indicate the SHSS Ethics forms completed herewith (✓):		✓	

³ 'Identifiable information' refers to information that would allow you to know, or be able to deduce, the identity of a patient. The most common examples of this would be accessing medical records or similar, or accessing a database that includes patients' names.

5) ^{DCS} If you have completed the Level 2/3/4 form please list any additional documentation provided in support of your application (E.g. Disclosure, consent form, participant information, GP letters etc., Data Storage Plan)

Documentation Name <small>These should reflect content</small>	(✓)	Documentation Name	(✓)
None required			

6) Signatures

Natasha Thomas _____
Applicant's Name


 Applicant's Signature

26th October 2016
 Date signed

Jonathan Wyatt
Supervisor⁴ Name


 Supervisor's Signature

27 October 2016
 Date signed

Please return an electronic copy of your UoE HSS Ethics Application Form (in its entirety) to your Section's Ethics Officer, accompanied by electronic copies of additional documents indicated above. We do not accept paper documentation; please scan all documents into electronic formats. Please keep a copy of all documentation for your records.

LEVEL 1 SELF AUDIT FORM

The audit is to be conducted by all staff and students conducting any type of empirical investigation, including research, audit or service evaluation.

The form should be completed by the principal investigator and, with the exception of staff, signed by a University supervisor.

^{SA1} **Primary Research Question:**

⁴ Not required for staff applications.

Please tick	What type of research are you planning to do?
	Study of a novel intervention or randomised clinical trial to compare interventions in clinical practice
✓	Study utilising questionnaires, interviews or measures, including auto-ethnographic data.
	Study limited to working with routinely collected clinical data.
	Meta-analysis or systematic review.
	Research database containing non-identifiable information.

^{SA2} Please provide a brief summary of your proposed study. Our interest is in areas of your methodology where ethical issues may arise so please focus your detail on areas such as recruitment, consent, describing your participants and the nature of their involvement, and data handling.

Project Summary:

This thesis explores themes around dissociation and experiences of oneness, as well as what remains between the two, as analysed by perspectives of relational psychotherapy (mostly person-centred and psychodynamic ideas) and those of Indian thought (primarily Vedantic and Buddhist formulations).

As an Indian psychotherapist and researcher, I can find myself between Eastern and Western worlds, rather painfully aware that one is privileged over the other, even when it comes to the most intimate decision of how I define my 'self.' There is thus a core difference in ontology between the two philosophical traditions, with the western focus being on studying objects within consciousness and the focus of Indian thought being on exploring consciousness itself (Cornelissen, 2008). I cannot know anything that is beyond my consciousness, so I use myself in this research to study these experiences, employing writing as a form of inquiry and focusing in particular on my work with a fictional client, 'Peter.'

The dominant narratives in psychotherapy have a tendency to problematize shifts in consciousness, albeit to varying degrees. Dissociation is one such label of consciousness- altering experiences, which I identify in myself. The trauma-based narratives of dissociation are therapeutically useful, but they also alienate the person from her journey and sense of power. There is a wealth of information within Indian philosophical discourses that are typically kept out of therapeutic thinking due to the polarising and fragmenting effects of colonisation. Thus, psychotherapy operates rather firmly within Western conceptualisations of 'self' (and consequently 'other').

This thesis seeks to expand further from this limited view. I draw on ideas from Indian philosophy, which serves to elucidate through a post-colonial perspective that the differences in ways of seeing self as within consciousness (in the west) and as self as consciousness itself (in the east) are central to this dissociative 'problem.'

In the thesis, I remain critical of psychotherapy that follows a healing plotline involving putting parts back together within the context of a carefully attuned relationship. Instead, I argue for a therapeutic relationship where accessing

states of oneness, which in many eastern traditions is understood as the 'true state' of who we are, allows for the possibility to shift awareness to the self (the expanded consciousness) that was never damaged in the first place.

Methodology

I plan to use 'writing as a form of inquiry' (Richardson, 1997) The philosophical positions of post-structuralism, post-colonialism, feminism and queer studies have stimulated 'writing as inquiry' as a research methodology which uses writing as a research tool in its own right (Speedy, 2005). This method aims to draw the reader's attention and engagement into conversations; curiosity, imagination and more questions (Speedy, 2005), not only say it "as it is." I use a "storying methodology" (Clough, 2002) to create a fictional client, 'Peter' and I write into the experiences of 'working therapeutically' with this 'client,' focusing on the main themes of this research.

Data

The raw data is the writing itself. The source of this data exists only within myself as I seek to explore and analyse my inner world through the writing. The 'client' character I create in this process is a literary device to explore the topic. I differentiate between the writing generated in the course of the project, which will be the raw data, and it is sources of inspiration. I recognise that I draw inspiration for the writing (the data) generally from personal experience, memories, dreams, and experiences as a therapist.

The process of creating a fictional client

This project is a self-reflexive piece, so it is not my objective to study something "out there." There are no external participants in this study, and the fictional data arises from within me. None of my past or present clients is a participant in this study. However, my writing is very loosely inspired by previous client work.

I aim for my writing to create a verisimilitude to my practice with "real" circumstances only playing the role of inspirational touchstones. I will not use any direct events from client work. I am attentive to the fact that "clients do not come to therapy to be written about" (McLeod, 1996) and I aim to respect this at all times.

There are distinctive ethical dilemmas that arise for psychotherapists who use their client work for research purposes, generating dual roles of therapist and researcher (McLeod, 1999). In this case, the "real" clients relate to the fictional client I create through the symbolic representations they occupy in my mind. Clients like other people in my life have the capacity to exist as internal objects in my psyche. It is these internal objects that I play with as I create a fictional character, thus using only my internal process for the piece. So the relationship between the fictional client and "real" clients exists only through me. The fictional account is focussed on my internal process rather than any real client's experience. Furthermore, in the unlikely event that any identifying factors of real clients

emerge in the writing process; these will be disguised or removed, to the best of my ability.

To give an example of my writing process, I am loosely inspired by the experience of a client once being so angry with me that he threw the money owed at the end of the session at my face, as he walked out. I source only on my feelings of shock, and humiliation from memory to fabricate an event in my fictional writing, while being cognisant of the fact that the real client's action itself could make the client recognisable. I plan to construct the scene in writing as the fictional client having an outburst that leaves me feeling stunned, but one in which he throws and breaks a glass of water as he storms out the door.

Ethical implications of creating a fictional client on real clients

Even though no real clients are participants in this research, clients who read or know of my research will have access to some parts of my internal processing which they would not have otherwise known. They would realise that I use my client work as inspiration for research. Although I have told all my clients since the beginning of my practice, that I am involved in academia and research in a general manner, I have been careful to speak about the kind of research in accordance with individual clients' needs and capacities. Therefore, if clients become aware of my research, I suspect this may lead to some perplexity for some clients who may feel uncomfortable and perhaps even suspicious of my motives in therapy. The safety and wellbeing of my clients are crucial to me, and so I attempt to show up for them, address concerns and take responsibility for how my writing may affect them. Furthermore, as the creator of this piece of work, I aim to be mindful of what I include and exclude from the final draft with the knowledge that clients may have access to my research in mind, knowing that both the inclusion and exclusion of my writing data has implications for others and myself.

Impact of self-disclosure on my clients

As a therapist and a researcher, it is important that I consider dual relationships mainly because clients may know about my research and this may have an effect on the therapeutic relationship. The questions of "who is it that benefits from therapy?" and "should clients know about how they impact their therapist?" arise. I hold the stance that psychotherapy is a joint endeavour and although the focus of the therapeutic work is on the client, the transformation and growth in myself as a therapist is inevitable and undeniable. Overriding this fact would be dishonouring my relationships with my clients as well as their influence as human beings who take up important space in my life. I do not attempt to hide my vulnerability, and I accept that I am a "wounded healer" (Sedgwick, 2003). Inner and outer worlds are not clearly separated in this writing intentionally to reflect the subject area of the research. It will become obvious in the writing that the fictional client who contain cut-off (dissociated) aspects of my experience that I have denied and redirected into 'him'.

As a person-centred therapist, my clients already have access to many parts of my internal processing, as congruence is central to my practice. Acknowledging their impression on me is a part of the valuing process that is fundamental to my work. So I do not believe it would be entirely new information to most of my clients that they have had a profound influence on me. In my practice, I attempt to reach into the truest part of how I feel, and I carefully decide if expressing this will be of benefit to the client and the relationship. In this research, although I try to search deeply for a similar sense of my truth that I access as a therapist, it is not catered to the individual needs of the clients who may read or know of the research. I plan to mention this explicitly in the ethics chapter of my thesis.

Current and past clients may feel differently about their therapeutic process, and it may alter their internalised version of me as their therapist. With current clients, I am available to discuss my on-going research and help contain any difficulties, although this may not be possible with past clients. I acknowledge that there may be complexities, which I can only be open and willing to explore as they arise. Knowing of this research may alter assumptions of some clients, particularly that of their therapist being somehow 'unbreakable.' I hope to be genuinely available to them to address this, both in my writing as well as in my presence with them in a counselling room so that I can potentially be reduced down to a more real yet fallible object they can relate to internally. I believe in this case I can only try to continue to be "good-enough" (Winnicott, 1969).

Future clients may use knowledge of this research project to influence their decision of wanting to work with me or not. As much a client may associate having a therapist who is involved in research with an assumption that it reflects increased knowledge in the field, it can also raise apprehensions about potentially being 'subject'. For this reason, I am mindful of how I speak to clients about my research, if it becomes relevant to the therapeutic relationship to accommodate and respect these possible concerns, while also accepting that some clients may never be comfortable with having a therapist who is also a researcher.

Ethical implications for myself

In this enquiry, I allow my writing to lead me, and I am aware that self-reflective writing of this nature can be emotionally intense for the researcher. It calls me to transformation, which can be a challenging process. I intend to prioritise my wellbeing and that of my relationships with family, friends, and clients over my research aims. It is for this reason that I have chosen to omit details of particular life experiences from my final draft, which could create an exposure I may not be ready for at this stage of my life. Furthermore, I practice active self-care through personal therapy, regular fortnightly clinical supervision as well as my yoga and meditation practice. I have been more allowing of myself to lean on friends and family for support and care. I aim to continue to develop self-compassion

as well as openness to vulnerability within my relationships, which I have found to be more useful to me than augmenting my old and familiar patterns of self-protection. I hope to be able to achieve a balance of separateness and togetherness to support myself during the writing process, and that being said permission to lose balance in the process as well.

The writing process is meant to be a disruptive and re-organising endeavour. It is intended to challenge narratives around power with regards to race, gender, and counsellor-client relationships. I am aware that doing this research will change the way I practice and would have implications for clients. For one, I am already much more attuned to issues of power in the counselling relationship. I can find myself looking for aspects of my therapeutic work that link to my research, and I use my clinical supervisor and group supervision to help me identify when I do this and discern if it is of use to the client.

The importance of exploring and uncovering my experiences and finding my voice through this research is one I cannot deny to myself. Nor can I underestimate the importance of allowing my personal perspective as one of a woman of colour in counselling and psychotherapy to challenge the dominant discourses in the field. I realise that academic integrity would suggest that what I exclude is as much of my responsibility as that which I include. The price I pay is that of being a more exposed therapist and a person in general. I hope to be one who is truer to herself as a result of the process I also realise that having access to my vulnerabilities through this research being in the public domain may allow clients and colleagues to see me as a real person and even use my humanity as a part of their therapeutic process. I aspire to remove the shame from some aspects of my experiencing in this process, particularly my ways of being which are not considered acceptable in a western masculine society. However, I do not challenge myself to expose more than I think I can handle safely. I hope this may be of some benefit to readers who may well be clients or colleagues to tap into their authentic experience as well.

Ethical responsibilities to Family and Friends

I do not plan to write about details of my family members or friends explicitly. However, I see the possibility of experiences with others perhaps as memories arising in my writing. After all, as an interconnected and interrelated social being, my story is *"never made in a vacuum and others are always visible or invisible participants"* (Tolich, 2010, p. 1599). Their impact on me is inevitable and they will be a part of my process either as internalised objects or simply as influences on me as a person. My family members are aware of the kind of research I am undertaking, and I will ask for their permission on any pieces of writing that may involve anything that may potentially allude to them. I am happy for them to read complete sections. Again, I will remove or alter details should the people involved be uncomfortable with anything I have written.

To give an example of this, I briefly mention my own 'memory flashbacks' in the process of my work with 'Peter', which are also fictional anecdotes inspired from carefully selected and reworked memories that are not too emotionally charged, those we speak about freely as a family. For instance, I write about the feeling of looking down a well at my grandmother's house as a child and how I can think back to that moment when I work with 'Peter' and we peer into the unknown in therapy

The process of this research will have some influence on my relationships, particularly with my family. We have had many conversations about my research, and I find that the research process has helped me develop a stronger voice in the family. I know the writing process can and will lead to changes in how we relate. A positive aspect is that my understanding of my experiences as collective, intergenerational and contextualised within a post-colonial aftermath has been a useful addition to my family dialogue in how we understand the story of our family as a group. On the other hand, I notice that finding my personal and academic voice in research accelerates my individuation process with the family. I do believe that we are close and supportive as a family, and the possible consequences of my writing may be tricky but not too challenging. I am committed to being present and available to them as well as to myself during the process.

I understand ethics in research to be an area I will have to visit and revisit over and over again through my process of using writing as a form of inquiry, through the various drafts of my project and even after submission and publication. Research creates effect and change on many levels and for this reason I believe it is essential to be mindful of its consequences and think about them in light of the responsibility I have to myself and others in the process.

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Please circle your answer as appropriate:

	ETHICAL ISSUES		
SA3	Bringing the University into disrepute Is there any aspect of the proposed research which might bring the University into disrepute? For example, could any aspect of the research be considered controversial or prejudiced?	No ✓	YES
SA4	Protection of research subject confidentiality <i>Will you make every effort to protect research subject confidentiality by conforming to the University of Edinburgh's guidance on data security, protection and confidentiality as specified in: www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/research-support/data-library/research-data-mgmt</i> <i>For example, there are mutually understood agreements about:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) non-attribution of individual responses; (b) Individuals, and organisations where necessary, being anonymised in stored data, publications and presentations; (c) publication and feedback to participants and collaborators; (d) With respect to auto-ethnographic work it is recognised that the subject's anonymity cannot be maintained but the confidentiality of significant others must be addressed. 	NO	Yes ✓

SA5	<p>Data protection and consent</p> <p><i>Will you make every effort to ensure the confidentiality of any data arising from the project by complying with the University of Edinburgh's Data Protection procedures (see http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/research-support/data-library/research-data-mgmt).</i></p> <p>For example</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Ensuring any participants recruited give consent regarding data collection, storage, archiving and destruction as appropriate; (c) Identifying information⁵, (e.g. consent forms) is held separately from data and is only accessible by the chief investigator and their supervisors; (e) There are no other special issues arising regarding confidentiality/consent. (f) That where NHS data is being accessed Caldicott Guardian approval has been obtained. <p>IT IS NECESSARY TO GIVE THE HEAD OF SCHOOL'S NAME AS THE CONTACT PERSON IN CASE OF ANY COMPLAINT. PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT THIS LINK IS PROVIDED on any Information sheet/consent form:</p> <p>(http://www.ed.ac.uk/files/imports/fileManager/WEB%20Complaint%20Form.pdf)</p>	NO	Yes ✓
SA6	<p>Duty to disseminate research findings</p> <p>Are there issues which will prevent all participants and relevant stakeholders having access to a clear, understandable and accurate summary of the research findings should they wish?</p>	No ✓	YES
SA7	<p>Moral issues and Researcher/Institutional Conflicts of Interest</p> <p><i>Are there any SPECIAL MORAL ISSUES/CONFLICTS OF INTEREST?</i></p> <p>Examples include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Where the purposes of research are concealed; (b) Where respondents are unable to provide informed consent (c) Where there is financial or non-financial benefit for <i>anyone</i> involved in the research, or for their relative or friend. (d) Where research findings could impinge negatively or differentially upon participants or stakeholders (for example when selecting an unrepresentative sample of a larger population). (e) Where there is a dual relationship between the researcher and subject? E.g. Where the researcher is also the subject's practitioner or clinician. (f) Where research involves covert surveillance or covert data collection. (g) Where routinely collected data is used for research alongside novel data. 	No	YES ✓

⁵ 'Identifiable information' refers to information that would allow you to know, or be able to deduce, the identity of a patient. The most common examples of this would be accessing medical records or similar, or accessing a database that includes patients' names.

	NOVEL DATA COLLECTION SHOULD NOT BE CONFLATED WITH ROUTINELY COLLECTED DATA. WHERE BOTH ARE BEING USED THIS NEEDS TO BE MADE CLEAR IN ANY COVERING LETTER, PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM IN ORDER FOR INFORMED CONSENT TO BE POSSIBLE.		
SA8	<p>Potential physical or psychological harm, discomfort or stress</p> <p>Is there any foreseeable potential for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) significant psychological harm or stress for participants (b) significant physical harm or discomfort for participants? (c) significant risk to the researcher? <p>Examples of issues/ topics that have the potential to cause psychological harm, discomfort or distress and should lead you to answer 'yes' to this question include, but are not limited to:</p> <p><i>Relationship breakdown; bullying; bereavement; mental health difficulties; trauma / PTSD; Violence or sexual violence; physical, sexual or emotional abuse in either children or adults; feedback of results from the project's assessments.</i></p>	No ✓	YES
SA9	<p>Vulnerable participants</p> <p>Will you be recruiting any participants or interviewees who could be considered vulnerable?</p> <p>Examples of vulnerable groups, the inclusion of which should lead you to answer yes to this question include, but are not limited to:</p> <p>Clients or patients of either the researcher OR the person recruiting subjects; Children & young people; people who are in custody or care for example, offenders, looked after children or nursing home resident; persons with mental health difficulties including those accessing self-help groups; auto-ethnographic researchers examining distressing topics.</p>	No ✓	YES

Assessment outcome:

SA10 **Have you circled any answers in BOLD typescript?** Please tick as appropriate

No ☐ (i) Your responses on the completed self-audit confirm the ABSENCE OF REASONABLY FORESEEABLE

ETHICAL RISKS.

- (ii) Please now read the guidance below and provide the required signatures.
- (iii) You are NOT REQUIRED to complete a level 2/3/4 application form.
- (iv) Please submit the UoE HSS Ethics Application Form electronic document (in its entirety) along with ALL additional required documentation, failure to do so will mean that your form is returned to you.

- Yes ☒ (i) Your responses on the completed self-audit indicate that we require further information to consider your application.
- (ii) Read the Guidance below and provide the required signatures.
- (ii) You **ARE REQUIRED** to complete a level 2/3/4 application form.
- (III) Please continue to the next part of this document where you will find the level 2/3/4 form

Subsequent to submission of this form, any alterations in the proposed methodology of the project should be reviewed by both the applicant and their supervisor. If the change to methodology results in a change to any answer on the form, then a resubmission to the Ethics subgroup is required.

The principal investigator is responsible for ensuring compliance with any additional ethical requirements that might apply, and/or for compliance with any additional requirements for review by external bodies.

ALL forms should be submitted in electronic format. Digital signatures or scanned in originals are acceptable. The applicant should keep a copy of all forms for inclusion in their thesis.

Natalasha Thomas
Applicant's Name

Natalasha
Applicant's Signature

26th October 2016
Date

Jonathan Wyatt
*Supervisor Signature⁶

J. G. Wyatt
Supervisor Name

27 October 2016
Date

*NOTE to Supervisor: Ethical review will be based only on the information contained in this form. If countersigning this check-list as truly warranting all 'No' answers, you are taking responsibility, on behalf of the HSS and UoE, that the research proposed truly poses no ethical risks.

⁶ Not required for staff applications

LEVEL 2/3/4 ETHICAL REVIEW

- Complete only if indicated in the conclusion of your level 1 form.
- Applications will be monitored and audited to ensure that the School Ethics Policy and Procedures are being complied with and applicants contacted in cases where there may be particular concerns or queries.
- Research must not proceed before ethical approval has been granted. For this reason it is particularly important that applications are submitted well in advance of any required date of approval.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes', please elaborate and give details of how this issue is will be addressed to ensure that ethical standards are maintained. The response boxes will expand as you complete them. Forms that do not contain sufficient detail will be returned incurring delay.

BEFORE COMPLETING THE NEXT SECTION, PLEASE MAKE REFERENCE TO

<http://www.dataprotection.ed.ac.uk/activities/DPPolicyFINAL.htm>

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/records-management-section/data-protection/guidance-policies/research/research>

CONFIDENTIALITY AND HANDLING OF DATA	
ER1	What information about participants'/subjects' data will you collect and use?
<p>The raw data is the writing itself. The source of this data exists only within myself as I seek to explore and analyse my inner world through the writing. There are no external participants. I draw inspiration for the writing (the data) from personal experience.</p>	
ER2	What is the risk category of the information? (See definitions contained in http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/records-management-section/data-protection/guidance-policies/encrypting-sensitive/data)
<p>This is a Level 2 Application</p>	
ER3	Will the information include any of the following:
<p>(a) racial or ethnic origin</p> <p>(b) political opinions</p> <p>(c) religious beliefs</p> <p>(d) trades union membership</p> <p>(e) physical or mental health</p> <p>(f) sexual life</p> <p>(g) commission of offences or alleged offences</p>	
<p>No</p>	
ER4	Who will have access to the raw data?
<p>At earlier stages the data, as rough writing is only accessible to myself. However, since the writing itself is the data, the finalised, written-up form, with any potential identifiers removed, is also accessible to my supervisor, examiners and other readers of the thesis.</p>	
ER5	What training will staff receive on their responsibilities for the safe handling of the data?
<p>Not applicable</p>	
ER6	How will the confidentiality of the data, including the identity of participants, be ensured? Is there a strategy in place to replace disclosive identifiers of an individual or entity from the data?
<p>There are no external participants. Although the fictional 'client' character is loosely inspired by my client work, it is sourced from my inner process. Any identifying factors of real clients, should they arise at all will be removed or altered. My own identity as researcher is not hidden and the implications of this are explored in the project summary.</p>	

ER7 Will the information be transferred to, shared with, supported by, or otherwise available to third parties outside the University?	
YES/NO	If yes, explain why the third party needs to have access to the information and how the transfer of the information will be made secure. Attach a copy of the agreement you will use to regulate the transfer and use of data.
ER8 Describe the physical and IT security arrangements you will put in place for the data.	
The writing is stored on my personal laptop computer which is password encrypted.	
ER9 Does the system have a security code of practice under the University's Information Security Policy? (see http://www.ed.ac.uk/information-services/about/policies-and-regulations/security-policies/security-policy)	
YES/NO	If NO, explain why one is not needed.
As there are no external participants beyond the researcher. The data is creative fictional writing drawing from my own experiences. I store the writing (the raw data) on my personal, password-protected computer. I will only use it for this thesis and possible publication afterwards.	
ER10 Will the data be used, accessed or stored away from the University premises?	
YES/NO	If YES, describe the arrangements you have put in place to safeguard the data from accidental or deliberate access, amendment or deletion when it is not on University premises, including when it is in transit.
Only on my laptop computer, which is password encrypted and accessible only by myself.	
ER11 Specify where the data files/audio/videotapes etc. will be retained after the study, how long they will be retained and how they eventually will be disposed of?	
The raw data files will be disposed of within a year after the study. Only the writing (the data) in the finalised thesis will remain accessible to others and myself.	
ER12 How do you intend for the results of the research to be used?	
Only for doctoral research thesis and for possible publication.	

ER13 Will feedback of findings be given to participants/subjects?

~~YES~~/NO If yes, how will this feedback be provided?

There are no participants except myself and I have access to the findings throughout the process of the research.

ER14 Using secondary data:

~~YES~~/NO (a) Is this reuse compatible with what the data subjects were originally told about the use of their data? (e.g. were they told that it would be destroyed at the end of the study?)

~~YES~~/NO (b) Is it likely that someone could be identified from this data? (It is extremely difficult to make something totally anonymous, so even with secondary data there may be a need to apply security and access restrictions to it).

For more information regarding data linkage in evaluating interventions for the benefit of the population's health, please see: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/datalinkageframework>

Your application at this level is likely to require additional documentation, for example a Data Storage Plan, consent forms or participant information sheets. Please return to the Documentation Checklist on page 2 to list your supporting documentation.

SECURITY-SENSITIVE MATERIAL

ER15 Does your research fit into any of the following security-sensitive categories? If so, indicate which.

~~YES~~/NO Commissioned by the military

~~YES~~/NO Commissioned under an EU security call

~~YES~~/NO Involve the acquisition of security clearances

~~YES~~/NO Concern groups which may be construed as terrorist or extremist

IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THESE CONTINUE TO ER16. IF YOU HAVE ANSWERED NO TO ALL OF THESE QUESTIONS MOVE TO ER21.

ER16 The Terrorism Act (2006) outlaws the dissemination of records, statements and other documents that can be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts.

YES/NO Does your research involve the storage on a computer of such records, statements and other documents?

YES/NO Might your research involve the electronic transmission (e.g. as an email attachment) of records or statements?

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO ANY OF THESE YOU ARE ADVISED TO STORE THE RELEVANT RECORDS OR STATEMENTS ELECTRONICALLY ON A SECURE UNIVERSITY FILE STORE. THE SAME APPLIES TO PAPER DOCUMENTS WITH THE SAME SORT OF CONTENT. THESE SHOULD BE SCANNED AND UPLOADED.

ACCESS TO THIS FILE STORE WILL BE PROTECTED BY A PASSWORD UNIQUE TO YOU AND YOUR SCHOOL RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICER. PLEASE INDICATE THAT YOU AGREE TO STORE ALL DOCUMENTS RELEVANT TO THESE QUESTIONS ON THAT FILE STORE:

YES/NO

ER17 Please indicate that you agree not to transmit electronically to any third party documents in the document store:

YES/NO

ER18 Will your research involve visits to websites that might be associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?

YES/NO

ER19 If you answer YES to ER18 you are advised that such sites may be subject to surveillance by the police. Accessing those sites from University IP addresses might lead to police enquiries. Please acknowledge that you understand this risk:

YES/NO

ER20 By submitting to the research ethics process, you accept that your School Research Ethics Officer and the convenor of the University's Compliance Group will have access to a list of titles of documents (but not the content of documents) in your document store. Please acknowledge that you accept this.

YES/NO

Countersigned by supervisor/manager:

Name:

Date:

RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, RESEARCHERS NAMED IN THIS APPLICATION

ER21 Do any of those conducting the research named above need appropriate training to enable them to conduct the proposed research safely and in accordance with the ethical principles set out by the College?

~~YES~~ / NO

ER22 Are any of the researchers likely to be sent or go to any areas where their safety may be compromised, or they may need support to deal with difficult issues?

~~YES~~ / NO

ER23 Could researchers have any conflicts of interest?

YES / ~~NO~~

As a psychotherapist and a researcher, it is important that I consider that clients may know about my research and this may have an effect on the therapeutic relationship. Clients who read or know of my work will have access to some parts of my internal processing which they would not have otherwise known. Future clients may use knowledge of this research project to influence their decision of wanting to work with me or not. Furthermore the writing process may impact my practice. I have discussed these themes in more detail in the project summary.

RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, PARTICIPANTS

ER24 Are any of your participants children or protected adults (protected adults are those in receipt of registered care, health, community care or welfare services. Anyone who will have contact with children or protected adults requires approval from Disclosure Scotland at <http://www.disclosurescotland.co.uk/>)

NO

Do any of the researchers taking part in this study require Disclosure Scotland approval? (✓)

Not applicable

✓

Relevant researcher/s has current Disclosure Scotland approval through a current NHS employment contract

Yes*

*Ethical approval will be subject to documentation confirming Disclosure Scotland approval with this form.

ER25 Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort?

~~YES~~ / NO

ER26 Does the research involve any physically invasive or potentially physically harmful procedures?

~~YES~~ / NO

ER27 Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way?

YES/ NO
RESEARCH DESIGN
ER28 Does the research involves living human subjects specifically recruited for this research project <i>If 'no', go to section 6</i>
YES/ NO
ER29 How many participants will be involved in the study?
ER30 What criteria will be used in deciding on inclusion/exclusion of participants?
ER31 How will the sample be recruited? (E.g. posters, letters, a direct approach- specify by whom.)
ER32 Will the study involve groups or individuals who are in custody or care, such as students at school, self-help groups, residents of nursing home?
YES / NO
ER33 Will there be a control group?
YES / NO
ER34 What information will be provided to participants prior to their consent? (e.g. information leaflet, briefing session)
YES / NO
ER35 Participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please tick to confirm that participants will be advised of their rights, including the right to continue receiving services if they withdraw from the study. <input type="checkbox"/>
ER36 Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)
YES / NO
ER37 Where consent is obtained, what steps will be taken to ensure that a written record is maintained?
ER38 In the case of participants whose first language is not English, what arrangements are being made to ensure informed consent?

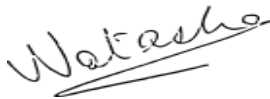
ER39 Will participants receive any financial or other benefit from their participation?
YES / NO
ER40 Are any of the participants likely to be particularly vulnerable, such as elderly or disabled people, adults with incapacity, your own students, members of ethnic minorities, or in a professional or client relationship with the researcher?
YES / NO
ER41 Will any of the participants be under 16 years of age?
YES / NO
ER42 Will any of the participants be interviewed in situations which will compromise their ability to give informed consent, such as in prison, residential care, or the care of the local authority?
YES / NO
BRINGING THE UNIVERSITY INTO DISREPUTE
ER43 If on the level one form you have answered YES that some aspect of the proposed research "might bring the University into disrepute", please elaborate alongside how this might arise, and what steps will be taken by the researcher to mitigate and/or manage this, to minimise adverse consequences to the University.

Subsequent to submission of this form, **both the applicant and their supervisor should review any alterations in the proposed methodology of the project.** If the change to methodology results in a change to any answer on the form, then a resubmission to the Ethics subgroup is **required.**

The principal investigator is responsible for ensuring compliance with any additional ethical requirements that might apply, and/or for compliance with any additional requirements for review by external bodies.

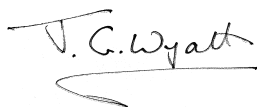
ALL forms should be submitted in electronic format. Digital signatures or scanned in originals are acceptable. The applicant should keep a copy of all forms for inclusion in their thesis.

Natasha Thomas _____
Applicant's Name



Applicant's Signature

26^h October 2016 _____
Date



Jonathan Wyatt
*Supervisor Signature⁷

Supervisor Name

27 October 2016
Date

*NOTE to Supervisor: Ethical review will be based only on the information contained in this form. If countersigning this check-list as truly warranting all 'No' answers, you are taking responsibility, on behalf of the HSS and UoE, that the research proposed truly poses no ethical risks.

ER44

ISSUES ARISING FROM THE PROPOSAL

I can confirm that the above application has been reviewed by two independent reviewers. It is their opinion that:

- a) Ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed and no further response from the applicant is necessary,
OR
- b) The ethical issues listed below arise or require clarification:

The applicant should respond to these comments in section 8 below.

Signature:

Position:

Date:

ER45

APPLICANT'S RESPONSE (If required)

⁷ Not required for staff applications

I have re-written and simplified my application following the reviewers' comments and feedback on the application for the same project made on 5th July 2016. I have used a new form due to a substantial change in methodology.

I have attended to each of the ethical issues that required clarification in the previous application:

- 1) There has been a change in methodology from using a fictionalised client to using a fictional client. I have made significant changes to my project, since considering the feedback I received on the first application regarding the implications of using fictionalised material. This overcomes many of the ethical issues of fictionalising. I have further clarified and elucidated my process of creating the fictional client. I have also explored the ethical issues that arise from using a fictional client and how they are addressed.
- 2) I have addressed directly the nature of self-disclosure in relation to ethical issues and how these issues will be addressed.
- 3) I have clarified what constitutes data and the level of ethics approval being applied for.
- 4) I have attended to the technical aspects of the writing, namely sentence structure, use of clause and dashes. I have attempted to clarify and simplify the project summary.

Signature:



Natasha Thomas

Date: 26th October 2016

ER46 **CONCLUSION TO ETHICAL REVIEW (if required)**

The applicant's response to our request for further clarification or amendments has now satisfied the requirements for ethical practice and the application has therefore been approved.

The below **recommendation** is to be communicated to the applicant:

The consideration Natasha gives to the impact of her work on past, current and future clients is adequate. Likewise self, family and friends. With respect to clients we notice that she considers the potential impact on clients who might imagine their therapist to be "unbreakable" but she does not consider the impact on clients who worry about the damage or burden they inflict on their therapist. We recommend that she considers that too in writing about ethics in her thesis.

Signature: Lorena Georgiadou

Position: CPASS REC co-chair

Date: 17/11/2016

ER47 **AMENDMENT/S: REQUEST FOR APPROVAL**

Subsequent to receipt of ethical approval above, I, the applicant, would like to request the following amendment/s to my original proposal.

Signature:

Date:

ER48

CONCLUSION TO ETHICAL REVIEW OF AMENDMENT

I can confirm that the above amendment has been reviewed by two independent reviewers. It is their opinion that:

- a. Ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed and no further response from the applicant is necessary,
- a. OR
- b. The ethical issues listed below arise and the following steps are being taken to address them:

Signature:

Position:

Date:

Acronyms / Terms Used

NHS: National Health Service

SHSS: School of Health in Social Science

IRAS: Integrated Research Applications System

Section: The SHSS is divided into Sections or subject areas, these are; Nursing Studies, Clinical Psychology, C-PASS.